

## The Nowhere Bible: the Biblical passage Numbers 13 as a case study of Utopian and Dystopian readings by diachronic audiences

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UNIVERSITY OF DERBY

THE NOWHERE BIBLE:

THE BIBLICAL PASSAGE NUMBERS 13 AS A CASE STUDY OF  
UTOPIAN AND DYSTOPIAN READINGS BY DIACHRONIC AUDIENCES

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Doctor of Philosophy

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## **i. Abbreviations**

BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
bSotah	Babylonian Talmud, tractate “Sotah”
Deut	Deuteronomy
ETI	Extra-terrestrial intelligence
Ex	Exodus
Gen	Genesis
Isa	Isaiah
J	“Yahwist”; term for an assumed source of the Pentateuch
Josh	Joshua
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
Judg	Judges
NT	New Testament
Num	Numbers
OT	Old Testament
P	“Priestly source”; term for an assumed source of the Pentateuch
Ps	Psalms
Rev	Revelation
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SF	Science Fiction
v./vv.	Verse/verses
1 Chr	1 Chronicles
1 Kgs	1 Kings
2 Chr	2 Chronicles

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### **iii. Preface**

This thesis makes a contribution to biblical studies and closely related disciplines such as theology. It contributes a new reading of a biblical passage, thereby contributing to scholarship on the book of Numbers as well as scholarship on the biblical Exodus-Numbers-Joshua trajectory. Moreover, it contributes critical observations about modern scholarly engagement with the Hebrew Bible. Those passages of this thesis in which the biblical passage is read from the point of view of the non-protagonists are indebted to postcolonial theory and postcolonial biblical criticism and make a contribution to that particular area within biblical studies.

The methodological approach is derived from Max Weber and other scholars who use an ideal type procedure to investigate a specific cultural phenomenon in society. Observations about limitations and advantages of using an ideal type to describe, compare, and contrast phenomena can be useful to qualitative approaches in areas such as sociology and cultural studies, especially when cultural artefacts (literature, film, TV) are discussed as responses to a socio-political situation.

The thesis discusses utopian theory, especially utopian literary theory and science fiction theory, and thus makes a contribution to the interdisciplinary field of utopian studies by putting works of utopia or science fiction into a dialogue with the Hebrew Bible, thereby making the Bible available as a primary source in utopian studies.

#### **iv. Abstract**

Applying utopian theory to the Bible reveals a number of issues surrounding the biblical text within academic disciplines such as biblical studies, which study the Bible as an ancient cultural artefact, and among religious readers of the Bible. The biblical passage Numbers 13 was chosen as a case study of a utopian reading of the image of the Promised Land to demonstrate the Bible's multifaceted potential by externalising the presupposition brought to the text.

The underlying method is derived from an ideal type procedure, appropriated from Weber. Instead of comparing phenomena to each other, one compares a phenomenon to a constructed ideal type. This method enables one to compare phenomena independently of exclusive definitions and direct linear influences.

It has been suggested by biblical scholars that utopian readings of the Bible can yield insights into socio-political circumstances in the society which produced biblical texts. Using observations by Holquist about utopias' relationships to reality it is asked if applying the concept of utopia to a biblical passage allows drawing conclusions about the originating society of the Hebrew Bible. The answer is negative.

Theory about literary utopias is applied to the case study passage. Numbers 13 is similar to literary utopias in juxtaposing a significantly improved society with a home society, the motif of travellers in an unfamiliar environment, and the feature of a map which is graphically not representable. Noth's reading of the biblical passage's toponyms reveals that its map is a utopian map. Numbers 13 is best understood as a literary utopia describing an unrealistic environment and using common utopian techniques and motifs.

Despite describing an unrealistic environment, the passage was understood as directly relevant to reality by readers throughout time, for example by Bradford. Following two Puritan readings, it is observed that biblical utopian texts have the potential of being applied in reality by those who see them as a call to action. If a literary utopia is attempted to be brought into reality, it becomes apparent that it marginalises those who are not utopian protagonists; in



the case study passage, the non-Israelite tribes, in Bradford's reading, the Native Nations in New England.

The interplay of utopia and dystopia is explored and it is concluded that a definitive trait of literary utopias is their potential to turn into an experienced dystopia if enforced literally. This argument is supported by demonstrating that the utopian traits of the case study passage contain dystopian downsides if read from a different perspective.

A contemporary utopian reading of the case study passage is proposed. Today utopian speculation most often appears in works of science fiction (SF). Motifs appearing in the case study passage are read as tropes familiar to a contemporary Bible reader from SF. Following D. Suvin's SF theory, it is concluded that the Bible in the contemporary world can be understood as a piece of SF. It contains the juxtaposition of an estranged world with a reader's experienced world as well as a potential utopian and dystopian message.

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## **0. Introduction**

The Bible is a collection of ancient cultural documents which continues to influence contemporary society. Many readers of the texts we call “Bible” read it as a manual for how to live life, how to understand the world surrounding them, and how to make decisions in it. This thesis aims to demonstrate the interplay of suppositions brought to biblical texts and those drawn from it. Some Bible readers – scholars and believers alike – may understand a biblical passage as telling a true history. They read its characters as real living persons in the real environment of ancient Palestine or Egypt and assume that by reading the Bible closely, it is possible to reconstruct an accurate image of this past.

Other readers see the biblical texts as remnants of an ancient community’s utopian power fantasy, in which the characters are fictional protagonists in a fictional story about negotiating one’s minority identity in a past situation of cultural non-dominance. I want to show that neither of these perspectives excludes the possibility that both of them contain some truth, and that the conflicting extreme viewpoints about the Bible are at their core about whether or not the Bible is thought of as understandable to a modern reader.

This thesis achieves its aims by limiting its perspective to an approach and a passage – verbalising its presuppositions – whereby the inner-workings of readings can be made visible. The approach is “utopia”, the passage is Numbers 13. Reading a biblical passage as a utopia opens up a number of avenues of inquiry, as if opening a small maintenance hatch to glance at one small section of the inner-workings of an intriguing and complicated machine. The cog of “utopia” can only be gauged by considering how it links in with other concepts and questions: how does a utopia relate to its author’s reality and what are the societal issues the author sought to critique by describing a fictional world significantly better than her or his own? Is a utopia merely wishful thinking or is it its intention to call its readers to take action? If it is a call to action, who is

called to action by it: its primary, intended audience or any audience at any time? Thinking about these questions when one is about to apply them to a biblical passage, it becomes apparent that there are no simple answers in this interlinked and unpredictable machine of texts, times, and readers. If a Bible reader understands the Bible to be an accurate historical account, would a utopian reading be impossible for such a reader? If a Bible reader believes in achieving the utopia of a Promised Land or heavenly paradise in their reality, does that add utopian potential to the Bible? If this reader pursues their idea of establishing a biblically inspired Promised Land in reality with oppressive fervour, does it become a dystopia to those who would rather not live in a biblically inspired reality?

All of these questions are addressed in this thesis and some of them are answered, whereas others are just beyond the opening of the small utopian maintenance hatch. We can ask of the case study Numbers 13 if it was intended to be a utopian juxtaposition of an imaginary state of being with the authors' reality, or only the protagonists' reality. I turn to biblical scholars to see if they ever considered that it might be a utopia. If it were a utopia, we can ask whether it will help us to shed light on the authoring community, but in order to investigate this question we have to assess first how utopias relate to reality in general. There are readers who have left behind readings of the text which make quite clear that they understood the biblical passage as being directly relevant to their reality, and its "correct" interpretation as being directly relevant to their personal salvation. There are other readers who identify with those characters in Numbers 13 who are dispossessed or killed in the process of conquering the Promised Land. Reading Numbers 13 as a utopia would not work for such readers.

A utopian reading of this passage cuts it loose from common definitions and categories, but – being part of an imaginary machine of links and influences – does not leave it floating in relativistic space in which it simply *is* whatever one happens to decide it is. I am going to propose a contemporary utopian reading of it as science fiction with a very distinct conclusion. The Bible can be read as a message from a far removed time and space, supposedly transmitted by a non-human entity. Its continued existence in today's world is a social fact one has to come to terms with, politically, socially, and diplomatically. The Bible contains

the possibility of bringing about positive consequences in reality, as well as the possibility of bringing about confusion and conflict, because it remains impossible to unravel its “actual” meaning, and different meanings are propagated by diverse readers claiming authority.

In the field of utopian studies scholars sometimes acknowledge biblical images such as the Garden of Eden as a distant relative and precursor to utopian literature. Showing that utopian discourse makes available important avenues of thought to biblical studies makes a contribution to utopian studies as well, because it establishes a more than tenuous connection between biblical proto-utopias and generally accepted mainstream utopias, such as Thomas More’s. Throughout, I propose a responsible, ethical, and thorough treatment of the Bible in biblical studies, asking scholars to consider the possibility to include readings from the “Other” side as well as readings that do not rely on an accredited biblical studies-approved methodology.

Implicitly this thesis touches upon issues of questioning authority, even the authority of the giants on whose shoulders we supposedly stand. It wants to highlight that the passion of a reader has an important impact on what a text can turn out to mean in reality, whether or not scholars agree or call a reading “wrong”. It seeks to convey that categorisation should not be the end of the inquiry, and it embraces the unpredictable interplay of reader, time, and meaning. The meaning-creating reader is well-known in literary studies. The Bible, however, is unlike a single-authored novel or poem. Institutions and individuals may claim eternal relevance for its content, and may advocate adopting its values, derived from interpretation by members of an approved elite, in legislation.

Since we live with the Bible’s presence in society, this thesis helps to write a warning label for the Bible. Setting into motion one cog in a machine of which we only see one small part, can have unforeseeable consequences. The Bible is different from a garden variety utopia. Because it is understood as eternally relevant or as telling truthfully a history of a chosen people, there is a danger of confusing biblical utopia with reality. Biblical scholars who insist on reading the Bible as a faithful historical account add to this confusion. Utopian scholars have observed the inevitable dissolution of utopian communities and concluded long ago that utopias are not implementable in reality, but that there is a constructive

utopian impulse which drives innovation and change. Biblical studies could look to utopian studies to let go of the urge to prove the literal accuracy of a text and deal with the impulse behind a text instead – the utopian impulse, the biblical impulse, the religious impulse – while acknowledging that the story that generates the impulse is not implementable in reality.

This thesis is an interdisciplinary endeavour, which draws on a number of theorists and theories in sociology and literary disciplines, as well as on utopian and non-utopian primary and secondary literature. It bears distinct family resemblances to recent methodologies in biblical studies, for example reception history, reader response, and those “readings against the grain” which seek to approach the text from a specific perspective such as feminism, apologetically or polemically. Similar to feminist, deconstructionist, materialist and other specific readings, reading as utopia is a contemporary reading strategy, and significant portions of the thesis are concerned with exploring its novelty, its potentials and limitations. The point here is not simply to offer a reading “against” existing readings, as shown by my engagement with Noth and other biblical scholars. It is, rather, a reading “with” what is available.

While there may be resemblances and intersections, this thesis operates consciously *between* – not within – such approaches. It is an intertextual multi-dimensional approach which does not seek to trace one-directional influences, as reception history might. While we are dealing with biblical reception to an extent when reading Martin Noth or William Bradford through the lens of utopia, showing their texts’ place in biblical reception history is neither the aim nor the end of the investigation. The concept of utopia is the overarching paradigm whose possible interplay with the Bible is explored with the help of these texts.

Multi-directional anachronistic readings, which I would call “Pierre-Menard readings” following Borges and Suvin, have recently received attention in biblical studies, for example in the session “The Bible in the Work of Jorge Luis Borges”, which was part of the *Reading, Theory, and the Bible* unit at the SBL’s Annual Meeting 2013. While the title of this unit seemed to imply a reception history approach – the use of the Bible in a specific author’s work – the papers presented in the panel were not concerned with reception history. Rather, the presenters engaged with the possibility of using ideas and images found in one

or more modern works to propose and encourage “serious play” with associative intertextual readings. My thesis is strongly aligned with such approaches using eclectic intertextualities.

The literature review should be understood as a reference section. Short summaries of key points of specific works and authors can be found there, including references to points in the thesis where the works are critically discussed in more detail.

In chapter 2 “Utopia as an Ideal Type”, I propose to approach the definitions that already exist about the Bible, literature, literary genres, utopias and dystopias, by using an ideal type, rather than strict categories and definitions. This means that I am looking at and for family resemblances between individual phenomena rather than seeking to combine them within the same strict definition. I will explain how the idea of pluralism permeates the thesis, based on Donna Haraway’s proposal to embrace the irreconcilable and on Isaiah Berlin’s pluralistic utopia. The observations made there explicitly and implicitly underlie the rest of the thesis.

As a continuation of the chapter on method, epistemology, and ethics, I begin to address questions which concern the reading of the Bible as utopia and the possible aim of reading the Bible as utopia. Specifically, I address the question of how utopia relates to reality and whether a utopian reading is a useful tool in biblical studies to reveal more of the historical reality behind the utopian text. Reading biblical texts as utopia is an indirect approach to investigating historical reality and of course it does not see a biblical passage as a direct and accurate report of a historical situation.

I conclude that a utopian reading on its own is not a reliable method to make statements about a historical socio-political situation that gave rise to the utopian text. At this point one should ask what a utopian reading *can* do, if it is not helpful to reveal more about the historical reality at the creation of a biblical passage. The answer is that a utopian reading can be useful to say more about the text and its readers because it addresses the interplay of reality, wishful imagination, and taking action to bring about a change in reality.

Then I consider the case study Numbers 13 for the first time. Numbers 13 can be read as a utopia very convincingly since it exhibits distinct family resemblances with and can be compared to an ideal type of utopia. For example,

it contains a map, which is a common motif in many literary utopias. The map in utopia, as many scholars point out, is a fictional map whose fiction often becomes apparent when one tries to draw it. In order to test whether the map of Numbers 13 is graphically representable, I turn to authoritative readings of Numbers 13, particularly one by Martin Noth. Noth's reading does not help to graphically represent a map. The investigation does not stop at Noth's reception of the biblical passage, but rather shows how approaching Noth's work with a specific pre-conception – utopia – will impact a reading of the biblical text. Although Noth appears to read the map of Numbers 13 as a map of an empirical reality, his reading turns it into a utopian map. Therefore, I conclude, reading the passage today, it *is* a utopia. Since it has now been made a utopia I compare common utopian themes, such as the survey of the unknown land and the gathering of information about it, to the same themes in Numbers 13. Finally I compare the utopian map of Numbers 13 to another biblical text, Ezekiel 47, which includes a map whose utopian-ness is agreed upon in biblical studies.

Martin Noth was a scholarly reader who attempted to place the utopia of Numbers 13 on a precarious political map. In doing so he has not acted much differently from other readers of the passage at other times. Chapter 5 “William Bradford and the Utopia of Numbers 13” shows that Puritan William Bradford attempted to locate the biblical utopia of the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey on an empirical map too. His empirical map, unlike Noth's, was not the map of ancient Palestine but the empirical area of Cape Cod. In this chapter I analyse the interpretative work Bradford did on the biblical passage before the passage (and by extension the Bible in general) could become a useful referent mirroring reality and supporting Bradford's own supposed chosen-ness, his claim to a utopian Promised Land, and the encounter with those already living in his Promised Land.

The implementation of a biblical utopia is precarious, because there is no space for the stranger or the non-protagonist in the biblical utopia. While many literary utopias portray peaceful homogeneous societies with no real diversity, the biblical account of the utopian Promised Land acknowledges the presence of the non-protagonist and contains clear instructions about how to deal with the non-protagonist before the Promised Land becomes a homogeneous protagonists' utopia.



In Bradford's text, which contains references to the Native Nations of New England as being similar to the biblical Canaanites (the non-protagonists), the presence of the stranger comes into plain view. Looking back at Numbers 13 after reading Bradford's text, which describes stealing food from members of a Native Nation, the presence of non-Israelite tribes in Numbers 13 stands out even more than before, and the possibility of a failure of utopia in reality as well. The outsiders impact the biblical utopia on two levels. On the one hand, the threat of being defeated by the stranger adds a dystopian dimension to the biblical image of the Promised Land. On the other hand, the biblically inspired oppression of perceived Others by self-proclaimed chosen peoples throughout history shows that a fervour to achieve an exclusive utopia is dangerous. One begins to wonder if setting in motion a utopian reading of this passage has in fact produced a dystopia.

Chapter 6, "Utopia and Dystopia in Numbers 13", investigates the interplay of utopia and dystopia. The presence of dystopia in utopia is a definitive and important aspect we should keep in mind, not only for readings of the Bible as utopia but for all readings of the Bible – something else that biblical studies can learn from utopian studies. Strict definitions may not have helped us to see this possibility. One may have excluded a dystopian reading of Numbers 13 if it had been read as a utopia already.

The ideal type, with which we can look at similar phenomena at different times, makes the issue of simultaneous utopia and dystopia visible. In an excursus at the end of chapter 6 I draw on theory about fantasy literature to read fantastic elements found in Numbers 13 and gauge their presence within a utopian framework. This excursus shows again that bringing in observations from other subjects is helpful.

Fantasy theory deals with the interplay of an author's intention, the textual world, and a reader's expectations, which helps us to see the ways in which the biblical text shifts according to the way we characterise the authoring community, the way we see the text's features, and with which expectations the reader encounters the text. In this excursus I will test two readings of Numbers 13, by Martin Noth and Ilana Pardes, to see which perspective they take on these issues. Applying fantasy theory to Noth's and Pardes' readings and the text, I

come to the conclusion that the biblical text is a discourse on identity and alterity rather than a discourse on what is real (which it would be if it were fantastic).

After having argued against one-dimensional readings with a dogmatic claim to finality and concluded that the biblical case study passage is a discourse on identity and the Other, one may ask: after all this, what actually is still left of the Bible? A utopia? A message? The final case study that tests Numbers 13 as science fiction (SF is seen as the primary location in which utopian ideas are still played out in contemporary culture) gives this answer: the Bible – including the passage Numbers 13 – can be understood as a message from a different time and space. I will compare the images and tropes of Numbers 13 to well-known works of science fiction in order to offer my own original reading of the passage and the way in which it creates its discourse on identity, which is astonishingly similar to ways in which such issues are approached in mainstream culture today.

The reading as SF implies a wider perspective on the Bible, biblical scholarship, and its potential in today's world. The Bible is not a fictional message from the future or from outer space but a tangible artefact from a similarly mysterious dimension of the past and a far removed culture. Just like the message received in Carl Sagan's *Contact*, which unites humanity in working towards a common goal, the Bible in today's world may contain positive potential. However, just like the message received in Stanislaw Lem's *His Master's Voice* or the strange objects found in Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's *Roadside Picnic*, which cause confusion, disillusionment, and conflict, the Bible may contain negative potential. Its message and its historicity may remain occluded, and analysing and interpreting its contents and contexts will not bring us any closer to history or God, but – just like in Lem's science fiction – it *will* show us a mirror of our own practices of interpretation and analysis.

The parts of this thesis which add to the critical discussion of Numbers 13 conclude that Numbers 13 is an anachronistic utopia that plays with the possibility of achieving a utopia of cultural dominance, as opposed to the possibility of continuing in a non-dominant state of being. Those parts of the thesis that encourage multidimensional readings conclude that the insight that utopia and dystopia are not mutually exclusive but rather simultaneous concepts,

could be adapted to shape a principle of reading the Bible that demands flipping the text around to look at it from the point of view of the stranger as well as from the point of view of the protagonist.

## **1. Literature Review**

Since the contribution of this thesis is to show the value of working at (at times constructed) intersections of different fields or genres – stopping at a cross roads and looking into different directions – this literature review can serve as a field guide. It can be used as a reminder to look back at how we got to the cross roads from a particular direction or to remind us where we are. The literature field guide introduces authors or texts that are significant within a field, for example the field of utopian studies, even if that particular text will not be analysed in detail.

Some sections of the thesis are dedicated to putting texts into a new relationship. Hence, a function of the literature review field guide is to provide an index of characters, of participants in the dialogues. The detailed characterisation of a text will not be found in the literature review but in the critical discussion in a particular chapter.

The review is structured according to topic area and within each topic area chronologically. There are overlaps and there are items which are difficult to categorise. In general terms the roads that converge are biblical studies, utopian studies, sociology, and literature. I begin by surveying utopian primary literature and utopian secondary literature; next, I survey theoretical and methodological texts and concepts that were used; and finally, I review literature about utopia in the Bible, and previous commentary on the case study passage Numbers 13 as well as reader response approaches to the Bible. In the theoretical and methodological texts there is a strong convergence of issues and implications from utopian studies and biblical studies, so it stands in the middle.

## 1.1. *Utopian literature and utopian studies*

### 1.1.1. Utopian literature

The biblical Garden of Eden, the Promised Land, descriptions of the coming of the Messiah, the New Jerusalem, or the Kingdom of God are ideas that can be linked to the later idea of utopia. They are imaginative depictions of places or states of being in which society is fundamentally different from the society in which the text is read. Other predecessors to Thomas More's *Utopia*<sup>1</sup> are Plato's *The Laws*,<sup>2</sup> *Republic*<sup>3</sup> and the idea of Atlantis mentioned in the dialogues *Timaeus*<sup>4</sup> and *Critias*<sup>5</sup>.

The pun "utopia" is a homophonic transcription of the Greek neologisms *eutopia* (good place) or *outopia* (no place) and was invented by Thomas More. Every discussion of utopia goes back to More's work *Utopia*, first published in 1516. In *Utopia* the fictional traveller Raphael Hythloday gives an encyclopaedic account of his experiences participating in life on an island called Utopia, where society is arranged fundamentally differently than in Europe. More's work explicitly contrasts an image of English society of the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the fictional society encountered by the protagonist to create satiric tension. Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun*<sup>6</sup> (1602) is an example of an early utopia, which does not make extensive or explicit references to the political situation at the time of its creation. The tension between the fiction and the reality with which it seeks to engage is mostly implicit.

Some Renaissance utopias, such as Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*<sup>7</sup> (1627), depict societies governed by principles which their authors thought of as ideal.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Paul Turner (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *The Laws*, ed. Trevor J. Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Republic*, ed. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Plato, "Timaeus," in *The Dialogues of Plato*, ed. B. Jowett, vol. 3, 5 vols., The Dialogues of Plato: Translated into English with Analyses and Introductions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), 339–516.

<sup>5</sup> Plato, "Critias," in *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. 3, 5 vols., The Dialogues of Plato: Translated into English with Analyses and Introductions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), 519–543.

<sup>6</sup> Tommaso Campanella, *The City of the Sun*, eBook, 2001, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2816>.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Bacon, "New Atlantis," in *Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia, New Atlantis and The Isle of Pines*, ed. Susan Bruce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 149–186.

For example, in Bacon we find the description of a society in which science and learning is valued above all.

In many utopias the response to the political situation at the time of their creation is apparent. Samuel Butler's satiric piece *Erewhon*<sup>8</sup> (1872) responds mainly to the British Empire of that time, and Bellamy's socialist utopia *Looking Backward*<sup>9</sup> (1887) is a response to socio-economic issues in the United States at that time. Some utopias, such as *Looking Backward*, contain passages in which issues in the author's society are explicitly highlighted. More's *Utopia*, which consists of two parts – "Books" – does this quite extensively in Book One. Other utopias, such as *Erewhon*, do not describe issues in the author's environment to which the utopia responds as explicitly.

The convergence of utopian literature and science fiction literature can be observed in *The Time Machine*<sup>10</sup> (1895) by H.G. Wells. I consider this to be a piece of science fiction with utopian traits, because it features technology that is as yet not realistically available (the time machine) and the juxtaposition of fictional societies with a fundamentally different home world. *The Time Machine* foreshadows the general tendency in utopian literature from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards to invent a fictional society considerably worse than the author's or reader's society, the dystopia. Some theorists, such as Lyman Tower Sargent, differentiate between utopia as a genre and science fiction as a genre, and attempt to put them into an accurate relationship with each other. The convergences are such, however, that it may be more constructive to speak of utopian themes in science fiction and science fiction themes in utopias rather than attempting to define two discrete genres.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*<sup>11</sup> (1915) still follows the utopian template of imagining an improved consensus society. The three protagonists are American men who spend time in a country inhabited only by women. In many 20<sup>th</sup> century utopias and dystopias there is a general tendency to depict societies which have been turned into totalitarian dystopias by being governed according to one rigorous principle, which does not allow or accommodate critique, dissent, or change. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards the

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel Butler, *Erewhon*, eBook, 1999, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1906>.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000-1887*, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998).

apparent stasis of utopian societies, which often make the proposed improved society appear totalitarian, becomes the subject of dystopias or critical utopias.

Yevgeny Zamyatin's dystopian novel *We*<sup>12</sup> (1921) sketches the image of a society in which life is governed by strict reason and in which emotional impulses are prohibited. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*<sup>13</sup> (1932) depicts a world state with strict control over reproduction and consumption. George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*<sup>14</sup> (1949) envisions a totalitarian regime with total surveillance.

Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *The Lathe of Heaven*<sup>15</sup> (1971) addresses the paradox of the realised utopia. The protagonist is able to bring about large-scale changes in the world, but he finds that even his best-intended utopian dreams lead to suffering by some, because he could not foresee all consequences of the changes. Le Guin poses a similar utilitarian question to utopia in her short story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"<sup>16</sup> (1973). In this story, a utopian society can only be upheld if one child suffers. Some inhabitants abandon the community in the end, convinced that the suffering of even one is not justified by the happiness of the many.

Dystopias make references to developments in the contemporary world, possibly containing a utopian hope of averting catastrophic outcomes of unchecked exploitation of resources (and human beings) or unethical treatment of scientific progress. For example, Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (*Oryx and Crake*,<sup>17</sup> 2003, *The Year of the Flood*,<sup>18</sup> 2009, *MaddAddam*,<sup>19</sup> 2013) is concerned with environmental collapse and the unforeseen consequences of progress in genetic engineering. Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*<sup>20</sup> (1985) is part of the classic canon of dystopian novels. It depicts a totalitarian state in a society in which only very few women are able to have children; these women are exploited by the pseudo-religious regime. Issues concerning agency and

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<sup>12</sup> Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*, Kindle Edition (Sydney: Momentum, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Flamingo, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harlow: Longman, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Lathe of Heaven* (London: Gollancz, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* (London: Gollancz, 2000), 275–284.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Atwood, *MaddAddam* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996).

control over one's own body are addressed in other dystopias as well. For example, in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*<sup>21</sup> (2005), in Juli Zeh's *Corpus Delicti*<sup>22</sup> (2009), in Neal Shusterman's *Unwind*<sup>23</sup> (2009) and in Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*<sup>24</sup> series (since 2005). Whereas utopias often describe a homogeneous society which is so harmonious that there is simply no need for dissent, dystopias frequently contain a theme of rebellion, dissent, and searching for an alternative to the totalitarian system, so for example in *The Handmaid's Tale*, in Alan Moore and David Lloyd's graphic novel *V for Vendetta*<sup>25</sup> (1982), or Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*<sup>26</sup> (2008).

Science fiction has been described as the primary locus in which utopian and dystopian ideas are played out in contemporary literature. Four works generally considered to be science fiction are discussed in this thesis: *Roadside Picnic*<sup>27</sup> (1971) by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *His Master's Voice*<sup>28</sup> (1968) and *Solaris*<sup>29</sup> (1961) by Stanislaw Lem, and *Contact*<sup>30</sup> (1985) by Carl Sagan. All of these novels discuss whether it is possible for humans to understand the completely Other or the universe, or if all attempts to do so merely demonstrate more clearly one's own culture of generating knowledge. Only *Contact* comes to a positive conclusion; a message received from outer space can be successfully decoded and brings about positive consequences for humanity.

### 1.1.2. Secondary literature about utopia and science fiction

While utopian and dystopian fiction was often written and published as a means to criticise tendencies in an author's present, the value of utopian thinking was discussed theoretically in what I call utopian secondary literature. One can observe that, in general terms, the development of opinions in utopian secondary literature runs parallel to the development of conventions in utopian primary literature, such as the rise of the critical utopia or dystopia. Scholars

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<sup>21</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Juli Zeh, *Corpus Delicti: Ein Prozess* (München: btb, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Neal Shusterman, *Unwind* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Scott Westerfeld, *Uglies* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Alan Moore et al., *V for Vendetta* (New York: Vertigo/DC Comics, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (London: Scholastic, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Arkady Strugatsky and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic* (London: Gollancz, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Stanislaw Lem, *His Master's Voice* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris* (London: Faber, 1971).

<sup>30</sup> Carl Sagan, *Contact* (London: Arrow, 2009).



such as Fredric Jameson, Darko Suvin and Lyman Tower Sargent take into account science fiction in their literary theoretical work, discussing the interrelatedness of the genres.

Marx and Engels referred to Fourier, Saint-Simon, and Owen of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century as “utopian” socialists.<sup>31</sup> The designation “utopian” was understood to be derogatory by those to whom it was applied. Marx and Engels criticised the “utopian” socialists and their followers as forever looking into the future and believing in the possibility of inventing systems that seemed detached from historical realities, whereas the “utopian” socialists considered their ideas to be scientifically sound and implementable.<sup>32</sup> Ernst Bloch,<sup>33</sup> on the other hand, not unlike Karl Mannheim, saw a valuable impulse for future change in utopian thinking.

Ruth Levitas’ *The Concept of Utopia*<sup>34</sup> (1990) sketches the responses to and re-interpretations of utopian thought by Marx, Engels, Sorel, Bloch, Mannheim, Morris, and others. Her book is a survey of utopian thought and some utopian literature (Morris), which deals thoughtfully with the difficulty of the interdisciplinarity of the field of utopian studies. Levitas suggests using a Weberian ideal type to approach the concept of utopia. This work does not deal with the poetics of literary utopias but focuses on such works that discuss utopia as a realistic, unrealistic, or dangerous actual proposal for social change.

Paul Ricoeur’s *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*<sup>35</sup> draws on the work and thought of the same thinkers as are discussed in Levitas’ book to develop a philosophical argument about the relationship between ideology and reality. Utopia, he says (in lecture 10 about Karl Mannheim), maintains a distance between imagination and reality. His three lectures on utopia focus on Mannheim, Saint-Simon, and Fourier – the latter two considered among the “utopian” socialists – defining utopia as located in the realm of the unreal,

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<sup>31</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Perth: Joshua James Press, 2006), 42. Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, trans. Edward Aveling (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1908), 51–52.

<sup>32</sup> J.F.C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 46.

<sup>33</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, trans. Anthony A. Nassar (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (London: Philip Allan, 1990).

<sup>35</sup> Paul Ricoeur and George H. Taylor, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

allowing one to consider what might be possible but, in fact, advocating action to change reality. Literary utopias are mentioned only in passing. The ideal type of utopia established in my thesis draws mainly upon examples of literary utopias. Ricoeur, speaking about Mannheim once more, stresses that looking back at historical literary utopias such as Thomas More's, will not enable the literary historian to move beyond description, and thus obstructing a utopia's potential to inspire innovation. As I shall discuss in chapter 2, a utopia's potential to inspire action or innovation is not considered to be a definitive feature of the phenomenon, due to its potential to fluctuate extremely over time.

Since the case study passage is drawn from a literary utopia, descriptive literary approaches to the concept are primarily drawn upon when constructing a diachronically usable ideal type of utopia that does not define utopia by its potential to inspire action or by its perpetual distance from reality. Ricoeur's observation made in his introductory lecture that utopia can be viewed negatively, is confirmed, however not as Ricoeur says because utopias do not tend to contain concrete ideas about how to bring about an improved society, but rather – from a literary point of view – because they tend to contain their own opposite, the dystopia.

Starting in the 1970's there has been an emphasis on investigating the phenomena utopian literature and utopian thought independently of a perspective that seeks to endorse a specific utopian ideal or the utopian propensity as a useful tool to bring about social change (although discussions can be found about whether or not utopia is a useful catalyst to bring about changes in reality). An essay that is of importance to my argument of chapter 3 "Utopia and Reality" predates the increased interest in utopias and utopian thought in the 1970's – Michael Holquist's 1968 article "How to Play Utopia: Some Brief Notes on the Distinctiveness of Utopian Fiction".<sup>36</sup> Holquist's article deals with utopia as an abstraction from a reality. The insights brought forward in this article have implications for the discussion of whether it is possible to deduce historical circumstances from a utopian text, which is highly relevant when looking at a textual utopia that is not clearly attributed to a specific author or which is not accurately dated.

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Holquist, "How to Play Utopia: Some Brief Notes on the Distinctiveness of Utopian Fiction," *Yale French Studies* Game, Play, Literature, no. 41 (1968): 106–123.

At the beginning of an increased scholarly interest in utopian literature and utopian thought in the 1970's two works by Frank and Fritzie Manuel stand out by being most frequently cited, even in recent works: *Utopias and Utopian Thought*<sup>37</sup> (1971), a collection of essays edited by Frank Manuel, and *Utopian Thought in the Western World*<sup>38</sup> (1979) by Frank and Fritzie Manuel.<sup>39</sup> *Utopias and Utopian Thought* contains, among other useful essays, Northrop Frye's "Varieties of Literary Utopias" and Mircea Eliade's "Paradise and Utopia: Mythical Geography and Eschatology" (the latter is discussed in chapter 5 of my thesis).

An increased interest in science fiction and the interrelatedness of science fiction and utopia can be observed. The journal *Science Fiction Studies* was founded in 1973, publishing scholarly articles about science fiction and science fiction theory, as well as articles concerned with utopia and science fiction. In 1975 the Society for Utopian Studies (SUS) was founded, which has been publishing the interdisciplinary journal *Utopian Studies* since 1978. Lyman Tower Sargent is the founding editor of the journal *Utopian Studies* and has contributed much to the discussion about utopian literature and utopian thought.

He has compiled bibliographies on utopian literature such as *British and American Utopian Literature 1516-1985: An Annotated Chronological Bibliography*<sup>40</sup> (1988), "Australian Utopian Literature: An Annotated, Chronological Bibliography 1667-1999"<sup>41</sup> (1999) and "Utopian Literature in English Canada: An Annotated, Chronological Bibliography 1852-1999"<sup>42</sup> (1999). In his 1994 essay "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited"<sup>43</sup> Sargent distinguishes between utopian literature, utopian thought, and utopian communities. He furthermore creates a taxonomy of different types of utopias

<sup>37</sup> Frank E. Manuel, *Utopias and Utopian Thought* (Houghton Mifflin Co, 1971).

<sup>38</sup> Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1979).

<sup>39</sup> Manuel & Manuel's work is referenced as a standard introduction to the topic in Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP Oxford, 2010) and in Howard P. Segal, *Utopias: A Brief History from Ancient Writings to Virtual Communities* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent, *British and American Utopian Literature 1516-1985: An Annotated Chronological Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1988).

<sup>41</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent, "Australian Utopian Literature: An Annotated, Chronological Bibliography 1667-1999," *Utopian Studies* 10, no. 2 (1999): 138-173.

<sup>42</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent, "Utopian Literature in English Canada: An Annotated, Chronological Bibliography 1852-1999," *Utopian Studies* 10, no. 2 (1999).

<sup>43</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," *Utopian Studies* 5, no. 1 (1994): 1-37.

with subgenres. In this article Sargent engages with other scholars' work about differentiating between utopia and science fiction as well. While Sargent's approach provides one possible way to categorise material, I will maintain in chapter 2 "Utopia as an Ideal Type" (and throughout) that constructing a strict definitive framework may be interesting, but that it is not the most useful approach for this thesis.

Darko Suvin's definitions of utopia and science fiction – literary artefacts which establish cognitive estrangement between the world described in the text and the world of the author – appear to be the most frequently cited definitions in late 20<sup>th</sup> century secondary literature on utopian literature. I survey his and others' definitions of the genres in 2.1. Suvin is an authority on utopia, science fiction, and the intersection of the two. Suvin's definition of utopia has been chosen here to measure the ideal type of utopia, which will be used instead of a fixed definition.

Suvin's work on utopian and science fiction literature, especially the relevant chapters from *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*<sup>44</sup> (1979), will be assessed critically in my methodology chapter. When approaching the differences between utopia and dystopia, his article "Theses on Dystopia 2011"<sup>45</sup> (2011) will prove indispensable, as will his work on science fiction, for example essays published in *Defined by a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction and Political Epistemology*<sup>46</sup> (2010).

Suvin has brought the concept of cognitive estrangement to the study of utopias and science fiction. This concept will become important especially (but not only) in my final chapter on Numbers 13 and the Bible as science fiction. His definitions of utopia and science fiction hinge on this useful concept, which refers to the feeling of estrangement towards one's empirical environment when reading fiction that juxtaposes a radically different environment to the known one.

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<sup>44</sup> Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

<sup>45</sup> Darko Suvin, "Theses on Dystopia 2001," in *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini (London: Routledge, 2003), 187–201.

<sup>46</sup> Darko Suvin, *Defined by a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction and Political Epistemology* (Bern; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010).

There are mutual inspirations in the works on utopian literature and science fiction by Suvin, Fredric Jameson, and Raymond Williams. Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future*<sup>47</sup> (2005), which collects his essays on utopia and science fiction, contributes important observations derived from concrete examples of utopian or science fiction literature. Jameson's work about the science fiction literature of Stanislaw Lem and the Strugatsky brothers, specifically the "Unknowability Thesis", will be introduced in detail in my discussion on Numbers 13 as science fiction in chapter 7.

One contribution by Jameson to utopian theory drawn upon throughout this thesis includes his observation that each new addition to utopian literature can change one's outlook on earlier examples. In "Progress Versus Utopia or, Can We Imagine the Future?"<sup>48</sup> Jameson argues that behind the production of utopian fictions (and literary genres in general) one can assume the construct of what he calls a political unconscious of which the utopia offers a small and abstract glimpse. In line with this thought is my exploration of whether it is possible to reconstruct the socio-political reality that may have given rise to a literary utopia in chapter 3. Jameson's ideas about the socio-political location of utopias and the idea of progress incorporate the difference between pre-capitalist as opposed to capitalist environments. Chapter 2 of my thesis is concerned with offering a method to investigate pre-modern phenomena by drawing on ideas that were developed in a post-industrial environment and using modern examples. Furthermore, Jameson stresses the importance of the utopian pun: a main function of utopia, according to Jameson, could be to demonstrate that it is neither possible to bring about utopia in reality nor to imagine it.

In the 2005 essay collection *Culture and Materialism*<sup>49</sup> Williams describes four types of utopias and dystopias, which are paradise (or hell), an externally altered world, a willed transformation, or a technological transformation. I use these types to contrast biblical utopias and critique (just as for Sargent's taxonomy) that a delimitation of a phenomenon into strict categories may

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<sup>47</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007).

<sup>48</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Progress Versus Utopia Or, Can We Imagine The Future?," *Science Fiction Studies* 9, no. 1 (1982): 147–158.

<sup>49</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005).

exclude examples of quasi-utopian literature that would be well worth considering. Williams' four types are discussed in detail in 7.2.2.

Several important observations drawn from Louis Marin's book *Utopics*<sup>50</sup> (first published in 1973) and his essay "The Frontiers of Utopia"<sup>51</sup> (1993) will be applied directly to the biblical text (similar to Roland Boer's approach, see below) in chapter 4 "A Utopian Reading of Numbers 13". Marin's theories are especially important for the utopian reading of the geographical descriptions which are featured in the biblical passage. One of the main theses drawn from Marin is that a utopian map cannot be rendered graphically. Another idea by Marin, which will be discussed critically, is that utopias play with neutral spaces. I will draw upon this hypothesis in chapter 6 on utopia and dystopia. When drawing up an ideal type of utopia in chapter 2, a comment by Marin will be used to argue that utopias are in the end always literary cyphers.

The production of literary dystopias and their relationship to utopias as found formulated in works of science fiction is the theme of, for example, Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan's edited volume *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*<sup>52</sup> (2003), which I will draw upon particularly in chapter 6 "Utopia and Dystopia in Numbers 13".

A different approach to the problem of the failed utopia or the utopian fervour which brings about dystopian consequences in reality, is offered by John C. Mohawk in his *Utopian Legacies: A History of Conquest and Oppression in the Western World*<sup>53</sup> (2000). Mohawk gives a convincing overview of the links between biblically inspired utopian ideas (or ideals), and conquest and oppression. This is the theme of my discussion of the re-appropriation of a biblical template by those who felt themselves to be in a similar situation as the biblical Israelites in chapter 5 "William Bradford and the Utopia of Numbers 13". Mohawk embarks from the point of view that one party's utopia is another party's dystopia. This thought, together with Margaret Atwood's theory on the relationship between utopia and dystopia, has significantly shaped my

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<sup>50</sup> Louis Marin, *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces* (Humanities Press, 1990).

<sup>51</sup> Louis Marin, "The Frontiers of Utopia," in *Utopias and the Millennium*, ed. Krishan Kumar and Stephen Bann (London: Reaktion, 1993), 7–16.

<sup>52</sup> Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini, eds., *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>53</sup> John C. Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies: A History of Conquest and Oppression in the Western World* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000).

conviction explained in chapter 6, that utopia and dystopia are ultimately defined by one's point of view.

In the chapter "Dire Cartographies: The Roads to Ustopia" in Margaret Atwood's book *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*<sup>54</sup> (2011) she is concerned among others with the function of maps in utopia. Maps, according to her, are often employed in literature to create an illusion of reality while really testifying to the fact that the place described in the fiction is not real. This idea will be drawn upon in chapter 4 in sections about the function of mapping and topography in Numbers 13. Atwood's chapter about what she calls "Ustopia" will contribute to the formation of my hypothesis in chapter 6, that utopia and dystopia can be regarded as ultimately the same.

Kenneth Roemer uses a reader response approach to utopia in *Utopian Audiences: How Readers Locate Nowhere*<sup>55</sup> (2003). Since it will often be concluded throughout this thesis that categorisation into fact or fiction, genre categorisation, and meaning are ultimately determined by the reader, Roemer's work on the audiences of utopias and also the essays collected in his edited volume *America as Utopia*<sup>56</sup> (1982) will be helpful in passages of my thesis, especially in chapter 4 on a biblical scholar's reading of a biblical passage as reality, chapter 5 on Puritan readings of reality and utopia, and chapter 6 on discerning between utopia and dystopia.

## **1.2. Theories, method, philosophy**

### **1.2.1 Ideal type derived from Max Weber**

One methodological influence is the ideal type procedure proposed by Max Weber, developed further and used by, for example, Karl Mannheim and Ruth Levitas (who apply it to utopias), Bryan Wilson and David Chalcraft (who look at the concept of sects and sectarianism by adapting a Weberian ideal type appropriate to their investigations), and other scholars who compare phenomena by relying on a "family resemblance" approach that can transcend linear chronology and direct influences. In order to compare phenomena Weber

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<sup>54</sup> Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (London: Virago, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Kenneth M. Roemer, *Utopian Audiences: How Readers Locate Nowhere* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

<sup>56</sup> Kenneth M. Roemer, *America as Utopia* (New York: Burt Franklin & Co, 1982).

proposed to compare each phenomenon to a hypothetical ideal type. This approach will show continuities and discontinuities between individual phenomena without depending on a direct relationship between them. Chapter 2 of this thesis deals in more detail with the ideal type as an approach to look at utopia in the Bible. Sources are cited and discussed there.

### 1.2.2. Jorge Luis Borges

Jorge Luis Borges' writings have significantly influenced my idea of how a text can be treated hermeneutically and comparatively. Similar ideas are reflected in the writings of many other authors, but Borges is the one writer where I have found these ideas described most distinctly and accessibly. What I have drawn from Borges' writings is a theory and a building block for the philosophical and ethical construct this thesis builds upon.

The theory is contained mainly in Borges' short story "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote"<sup>57</sup> (first published as "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" in 1939; first English translation published in 1962), which inspired the main epistemological point of departure in this thesis. In this story a fictional modern-day symbolist writes *Don Quixote*; not a copy of it but the actual work. By displacing it in style, language, and culture the text takes on an entirely new meaning. This story reflects an understanding that the meaning of a text changes depending on its reader and depending on into which culture it is transposed. This is highly relevant when approaching the Bible with anachronistic concepts such as utopia or science fiction, and also relevant to simply reading and trying to understand the Bible in the contemporary world.

A similar thought is expressed by Borges in the essay "Kafka and his Precursors"<sup>58</sup> (first published as "Kafka y sus precursores" in the newspaper *La Nación*, 1951; first English translation in *Other Inquisitions*, 1964); a text that pre-dates another text can contain traces of the later text. Borges argues that texts by Aristotle or Kierkegaard can resemble Kafka while not even resembling each other. Kafka is the overarching resemblance. In this thesis the overarching resemblance will be the ideal type of utopia, and even though the Bible and

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<sup>57</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. James E. Irby and Donald A. Yates (London: Penguin, 1970), 62–71.

<sup>58</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors," in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. James E. Irby and Donald A. Yates (London: Penguin, 1970), 234–236.



More's *Utopia* might not resemble one another much, they will begin to show resemblances when an overarching concept becomes available that enables comparisons.

### **1.2.3. Isaiah Berlin and Donna Haraway**

Borges, Isaiah Berlin (with Mohawk), and Donna Haraway have impacted a philosophical and ethical perspective maintained throughout the thesis. In Borges' short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"<sup>59</sup> (first published 1940; first English translation 1961) a world is created because its encyclopaedia is written. The boundaries of fact and fiction are tested in this story. There are many discussions of the Bible whose authors clearly believe that the biblical stories are faithful accounts of historical realities. Putting Borges' story about the literary creation of a world into a dialogue with texts that see the Bible as a witness to a reality, the insight I draw from this conjunction of Borges and those who read the Bible literally, is that by proposing literal readings of the Bible a world is created, at least in the mind of the literal reader and her or his followers.

From Mohawk I draw the warning that if the conviction that a textual reality (such as the one created in the minds of those who believe in the "truth" of the Bible) should be enforced, meets the power to actually enforce this textual reality, there is a real danger of bringing about a dystopia for those who do not share the conviction that the text is real on the one hand, and those who are excluded or marginalised by the text itself (the "Canaanites") on the other hand. Therefore, if we are convinced that texts can create realities, we must deal with this insight ethically as we are not authorised to prescribe dogmatically which realities the text should create (if any).

The next ethical or philosophical pillar, therefore, comes from Isaiah Berlin and Donna Haraway. In *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*<sup>60</sup> (1990) Berlin argues convincingly that no utopia can exist that does not admit that more than one truth is possible and that there is more than one correct answer to each genuine question. Biblical ideologies and many interpreters of biblical texts may not subscribe to this idea. Donna Haraway

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<sup>59</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. James E. Irby and Donald A. Yates (London: Penguin, 27-43).

<sup>60</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (London: Pimlico, 2003).

conveys in her “A Cyborg Manifesto”<sup>61</sup> (1991) that the coexistence of more than one truth and more than one correct answer is not a messy fragmentation that must be avoided. The general perspective taken here is that there is the possibility of many different interpretations being “correct”, and that there is an ethical imperative not to enforce one.

#### 1.2.4. Self and Other

The biblical case study foreshadows the Israelite protagonists’ encounter with other tribes. Chapter 5 discusses the role of the biblical case study passage in an encounter situation between William Bradford and members of a Native Nation. Chapter 6 explores implications of the presence of other tribes in the passage for its potential to be a literary dystopia as well as a literary utopia.

Concepts of self and Other in conquest or “first contact” situations are derived from their usage by Stephen Greenblatt in *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*<sup>62</sup> (1991), Anthony Pagden in *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*<sup>63</sup> (1982) and Robert Berkhofer in *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*<sup>64</sup> (1978). These three works share the view that the most conclusive statements when reading texts which report about such contact situations are not statements about the encountered Other, but covert statements about the writer’s culture of origin.

Chapter 7 analyses the biblical scenario of contact between a protagonist group and antagonist groups. In this analysis literary theory about fictional encounters in science fiction literature is drawn upon, specifically relevant passages from Margaret Atwood’s *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*<sup>65</sup> (2011) and Fredric Jameson’s *Archaeologies of the Future*<sup>66</sup> (2007). Atwood speaks of the imaginary capacity needed to imagine a being not

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<sup>61</sup> Donna Jeanne Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association, 1991), 149–181.

<sup>62</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>63</sup> Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>64</sup> Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 1978).

<sup>65</sup> Atwood, *In Other Worlds*.

<sup>66</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*.

like oneself and that one could imagine this being as hostile towards oneself or benevolent. Jameson, informed by novels by Lem, considers the possibility of an indifferent Other, neither hostile nor benevolent.

Chapter 7 furthermore poses the question whether a biblical text itself can be considered an Other and whether its alterity has implications for the confidence with which statements about it and the biblical past can be made. Robert Carroll has referred to the Bible as an Other or an alien artefact in *Wolf in the Sheepfold: The Bible as a Problem for Christianity*<sup>67</sup> (1991). Observations and theories about self and Other drawn from all these works are supplemented with the concepts “The Stranger” by Georg Simmel (first published as “Exkurs über den Fremden” in *Soziologie*, 1908; published in English in *On Individuality and Social Forms*<sup>68</sup>), and the “Looking-Glass Self” introduced by Charles Horton Cooley in *Human Nature and the Social Order*<sup>69</sup> (1902). Simmel conceptualises a stranger as an essentially positive addition to an in-group, who enables identity formation, as long as this stranger is not dehumanised. Cooley says that one becomes especially aware of one’s own identity in the encounter with another.

### **1.3. Biblical studies**

#### **1.3.1. Bible as utopia**

Some previous work focuses specifically on utopia and/in the Bible. Thomas L. Thompson’s *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources*<sup>70</sup> (1992) argues that the aim of the Bible redactors of the Persian period was not primarily to give an account of the past but to meet the ideological needs of the present by describing past and future in utopian terms. Thompson does not reflect on definitions of utopia or on utopian reading as a method or a reading strategy to approach biblical texts.

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<sup>67</sup> Robert P. Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold: The Bible as a Problem for Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1991).

<sup>68</sup> Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald N. Levine, *The Heritage of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

<sup>69</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*, PDF eBook (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1902), <http://archive.org/details/humannaturesocia00cooluoft>.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 1992). Especially chapter 8, “Israel’s Tradition: The Formation of Ethnicity”.

In this thesis “reading as utopia” is considered one of many possible reading strategies. Roland Boer’s *Novel Histories*<sup>71</sup> (1997) and Steven Schweitzer’s *Reading Utopia in Chronicles*<sup>72</sup> (2009) are valuable critical assessments of the utopian approach as a reading strategy and good examples of reading utopia in the Bible. Boer reads the books of Chronicles as a utopia to demonstrate the arbitrariness of biblical interpretation. Boer’s method when reading Chronicles “as though” these books were utopia or science fiction is to look for a set of features that are found both in the biblical text and in utopian literature. He systematically matches these utopian features, which he draws to a large extent from Louis Marin’s work, with features of Chronicles.

Steven Schweitzer’s *Reading Utopia in Chronicles* aims to propose a new reading of Chronicles to help overcome a lack of consensus in Chronicles scholarship. He is concerned with three themes in Chronicles: genealogies, politics, and temple cult. Boer provides Schweitzer’s point of departure. Schweitzer relies on Lyman Tower Sargent and Darko Suvin for definitions of utopia but recognises the many inconsistencies and tensions between definitions of utopia. This is one issue I am going to engage with and remedy by proposing to use an ideal type or “family resemblance” approach to utopia instead of a strict definition.

In the essay “Visions of the Future as Critique of the Present”<sup>73</sup> (2006) published in *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*,<sup>74</sup> a volume edited by Ehud Ben Zvi, Schweitzer uses utopian theory to analyse Second Zechariah and describes the use of utopian literary theory as a relatively recent methodological approach in biblical studies. Similar thoughts are also expressed in his article “Utopia and Utopian Literary Theory: Some Preliminary Observations”<sup>75</sup> (2006, *ibid.*). Schweitzer gives arguments in favour of the utopian reading as opposed

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<sup>71</sup> Roland Boer, *Novel Histories: The Fiction of Biblical Criticism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

<sup>72</sup> Steven Schweitzer, *Reading Utopia in Chronicles* (T & T Clark International, 2009).

<sup>73</sup> Steven Schweitzer, “Visions of the Future as Critique of the Present: Utopian and Dystopian Images of the Future in Second Zechariah,” in *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi (Helsinki; Göttingen: Finnish Exegetical Society; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 249–267.

<sup>74</sup> Ehud Ben Zvi, ed., *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature* (Helsinki; Göttingen: Finnish Exegetical Society; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

<sup>75</sup> Steven Schweitzer, “Utopia and Utopian Literary Theory: Some Preliminary Observations,” in *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi (Helsinki; Göttingen: Finnish Exegetical Society; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 13–26.

to a redaction critical reading. Source criticism or redaction criticism do not take the textual unity into account. The fact that a utopian reading is only one way of reading which does not necessarily assert that a text “is” a utopia, could receive more extensive mention in Schweitzer’s work. By applying utopian theory to a text we are not asserting that the text “is” a utopia at first, only that it can be “read as” a utopia, which Boer makes very clear.

Ehud Ben Zvi’s edited volume *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature* (2003) is an important contribution to approaching utopian motifs in biblical and pre-biblical literature, bringing together essays by different scholars who believe in the value of the utopian approach in biblical studies. In Ben Zvi’s essay in this volume “Utopias, Multiple Utopias, and Why Utopias at All? The Social Roles of Utopian Visions in Prophetic Books within Their Historical Context”<sup>76</sup> he advocates utopian readings of the prophetic books as a potential way to make statements about the historical setting in which the texts were created. As I will argue in chapter 3 “Utopia and Reality”, I am more pessimistic than Ben Zvi that it is possible to draw reliable conclusions about the reality behind the production of a utopian text.

In the same volume we find Philip Davies’ article “The Wilderness Years: Utopia and Dystopia in the Book of Hosea”.<sup>77</sup> I will use this article by Davies and his “The Bible: Utopian, Dystopian, or Neither? Or: Northrop Frye Meets Monty Python”<sup>78</sup> (2012) to support my argument about the simultaneity of utopia and dystopia in chapter 6.

A number of articles and edited volumes (for example *Violence, Utopia, and the Kingdom of God: Fantasy and Ideology in the Bible*,<sup>79</sup> edited by Pippin and Aichele) make reference to the concept of utopia in the Bible. The articles and volumes summarised above show the most awareness of the fact that they

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<sup>76</sup> Ehud Ben Zvi, “Utopias, Multiple Utopias, and Why Utopias at All? The Social Roles of Utopian Visions in Prophetic Books within Their Historical Context,” in *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi (Helsinki; Göttingen: Finnish Exegetical Society; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 55–85.

<sup>77</sup> Philip R. Davies, “The Wilderness Years: Utopia and Dystopia in the Book of Hosea,” in *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi (Helsinki; Göttingen: Finnish Exegetical Society; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 160–174.

<sup>78</sup> Philip R. Davies, “The Bible: Utopian, Dystopian, or Neither? Or: Northrop Frye Meets Monty Python,” *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception* 2, no. 1 (2012): 91–107.

<sup>79</sup> George Aichele and Tina Pippin, *Violence, Utopia, and the Kingdom of God: Fantasy and Ideology in the Bible* (London: Routledge, 1998).

are engaging with a large interdisciplinary field in which there is little consensus on genre delimitations or definitions.

Articles that reference the concept of utopia and look at specific biblical passages or concepts in utopian terms are, for example, “Literacy, Utopia and Memory: Is There a Public Teaching in Deuteronomy?”<sup>80</sup> (2012) by Kåre Berge, “Utopia and Ideology in 1-2 Chronicles”<sup>81</sup> (2011) by Joseph Blenkinsopp, or “Whispered Utopia: Dreams, Agendas, and Theocratic Aspirations in Yehud”<sup>82</sup> (2010) by Jeremiah Cataldo.

Berge tries to determine not so much whether we can read the book of Deuteronomy as utopia but rather whether it *is* utopia, using mainly Mannheim and Bloch’s understandings of utopia in a seemingly quite rigid perception of the concept that does not take into account that whether a text actually *is* utopia is harder to determine than whether it can be *read as* utopia.

Blenkinsopp, too, references Mannheim’s *Ideology and Utopia* to put forward his working definition of utopia, which is not simply a description of an ideal place or society but the incongruity which appears if a description is at odds with an audience’s experienced reality. Cataldo uses concepts from More’s *Utopia* to assess the idea of theocracy in the community of returnees from the Babylonian Exile in the books Ezra-Nehemiah. Reading Cataldo’s essay it comes to mind that juxtaposing themes from the books Ezra-Nehemiah with “utopian” socialists such as Robert Owen might be a better approach than comparing it to Thomas More’s heuristic *Utopia*, which does not explicitly advocate building a community literally based on the description of the fictional island but only aims to create a critical tension between fiction and reality.

In “Models of Utopia in the Biblical Tradition”<sup>83</sup> (2000) John J. Collins suggests that there are four types of biblical utopia: agricultural, urban, ideal communities, and images in Genesis, which reappear in apocalyptic visions. An important observation by Collins is that many biblical utopias are conditional

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<sup>80</sup> Kåre Berge, “Literacy, Utopia and Memory: Is There a Public Teaching in Deuteronomy?,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 12 (2012), doi:10.5508/jhs.2012.v12.a3.

<sup>81</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Ideology and Utopia in 1–2 Chronicles,” in *What Was Authoritative for Chronicles?*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Diana Edelman (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 89–103.

<sup>82</sup> Jeremiah W. Cataldo, “Whispered Utopia: Dreams, Agendas, and Theocratic Aspirations in Yehud,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 24, no. 1 (2010): 53–70.

<sup>83</sup> John J. Collins, “Models of Utopia in the Biblical Tradition,” in *A Wise and Discerning Mind: Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long*, ed. Saul M. Olyan (Providence: Brown University Press, 2000), 51–67.

utopias whose realisation depends on whether or not the conditions of the covenant with YHWH are met by the people. I will argue in chapter 6 “Utopia and Dystopia in Numbers 13” that this is definitely the case in Numbers 13 as well.

Vincent Geoghegan’s article “Religious Narrative, Post-secularism and Utopia”<sup>84</sup> (2000) suggests to reconsider the Bible and its utopian potential in a “post-secular” world. My thesis addresses some methodological, epistemological, and thematic issues that are dealt with in his article as well (though they were formulated independently from Geoghegan’s article): the need to reconsider categories and how they relate to each other, the value and disadvantages of “playful” readings of the Bible, and – finally – the question of the general “knowability” of the Bible, addressed especially in section 7.4 of my thesis.

### **1.3.2. The Bible and Numbers 13**

Critical perspectives on biblical history writing and biblical history are found, for example, in John van Seters’ *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History*<sup>85</sup> (1983). Van Seters argues in favour of unity despite the incorporation of what might be called different genres of writing. The terms “history writing” and “historiography” are used in his sense throughout this thesis, where “history writing” is considered a genre of “historiography”. “Historiography” is a term that includes texts that make reference to a past without necessarily telling a national history.

Keith Whitelam’s *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History*<sup>86</sup> (1997) as well as Philip Davies’ *In Search of Ancient Israel: A Study in Biblical Origins*<sup>87</sup> (1992) provide the underpinning of a generally sceptical stance this thesis takes on the issue of whether or not the biblical text is an accurate report of historical fact. My position (at least for the

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<sup>84</sup> Vincent Geoghegan, “Religious Narrative, Post-Secularism and Utopia,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 3, no. 2–3 (2000): 205–224.

<sup>85</sup> John Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

<sup>86</sup> Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>87</sup> Philip R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel: A Study in Biblical Origins*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).

duration of the experiment with intersecting readings of this thesis) is radical: the history contained in the case study passage of Numbers 13 is the history which the passage's interpreters, like Puritan William Bradford, have created from it. This stance will be the main point in chapter 4 on the utopian geography of Numbers 13, which confronts this radical stance with more traditional scholarly readings of Numbers 13 like the one by Martin Noth in his *Das vierte Buch Mose: Numeri*<sup>88</sup> (1966). Noth's reading is not radically different from other readings which I would group under the category of "contemporary traditional scholarly readings", for example Jacob Milgrom's *Torah Commentary: Numbers*<sup>89</sup> (1992), *Numbers*<sup>90</sup> (1996) by Dennis T. Olson or *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation*<sup>91</sup> (Anchor Bible Series, 1993) by Baruch Levine.

In chapter 5 in particular, I will be concerned with what I am going to call "committed readings", by which I mean readings by readers who see their personal salvation at stake when interpreting biblical texts. As examples of "committed" readings I have chosen William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*<sup>92</sup> (written between 1630 and 1651), because he makes direct reference to Numbers 13, and Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*<sup>93</sup> (1702). As mentioned above, the radical stance taken here is that there is no history in Numbers 13 other than that created by such readings. Therefore, the natural next step is to look at literature that discusses the consequences of viewing reality and history through biblical lenses.

Such discussions are found in postcolonial criticism of the Bible. With regard to chapter 6 on utopia and dystopia, Edward Said's review of Michael Walzer's book *Exodus and Revolution*<sup>94</sup> (1986) is important. In this review titled "Michael Walzer's 'Exodus and Revolution': A Canaanite Reading"<sup>95</sup> (1986)

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<sup>88</sup> Martin Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose Numeri*, 25 vols., Das Alte Testament Deutsch (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966).

<sup>89</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Torah Commentary: Numbers*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992).

<sup>90</sup> Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996).

<sup>91</sup> Baruch Levine, ed., *Numbers 1-20*, Anchor Bible 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1993).

<sup>92</sup> William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. Harvey Wish (New York: Capricorn, 1962).

<sup>93</sup> Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: Or, The Ecclesiastical History of New-England*, PDF eBook (Hartford: Silas Andrus and Son, 1855).

<sup>94</sup> Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic, 1986).

<sup>95</sup> Edward W. Said, "Michael Walzer's 'Exodus and Revolution': A Canaanite Reading," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (1986): 86–106.



Said offers – as the title says – a “Canaanite Reading”, that is, a reading from the point of view of those who experience the dystopian downside of the allegedly successful utopia of liberation and empowerment of others.

A similar reading from a minority perspective is offered by Robert Allan Warrior in his article “A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians”<sup>96</sup> (1991). Warrior aims to draw more attention to the two-sidedness of the covenant between Israel and YHWH, which does not only consist of deliverance but also of conquest. Warrior pays attention to the characterisation of the Canaanites in the Bible. I will expand on this by discussing how the Promised Land’s inhabitants are dehumanised in Number 13 in chapter 6 on dystopia and chapter 7 on science fiction.

Another non-traditional reading that also draws on postcolonial theory is Ilana Pardes’ *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible*<sup>97</sup> (2002). Her commentary enables my further readings of certain elements of Numbers 13. For example, she reads the image of a land that eats its inhabitants, the presence of supposed giants, and the comparison of oneself to a grasshopper in such a way as to inspire and enable my readings of these elements of the biblical case study in chapter 6 on dystopia and 7 on science fiction.

Howard Curzer’s article “Spies and Lies: Faithful, Courageous Israelites and Truthful Spies”<sup>98</sup> (2010) provides a very interesting “flipped” reading of Numbers 13 that views the text slightly slantwise and argues that especially the parallel to Numbers 13 found in Deuteronomy 1:22-28 does not say anything about historical truths but rather gives an impression of Moses’ leadership.

### **1.3.3. Reader response approaches to the Bible**

In addition to the non-traditional readings of the Bible mentioned above, like those by Pardes, Curzer, or Warrior, different passages of this thesis are closely related to “reader response” approaches to inform discussions about the interplay

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<sup>96</sup> Robert Allen Warrior, “A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (New York: Orbis, 1991), 287–295.

<sup>97</sup> Ilana Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>98</sup> Howard J. Curzer, “Spies and Lies: Faithful, Courageous Israelites and Truthful Spies,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35, no. 2 (December 1, 2010): 187–195.

between the biblical passage and different readers, such as William Bradford, Cotton Mather, Martin Noth, and even myself. One could argue that a reader response analysis of the reading of a 16<sup>th</sup> century Bible reader is undertaken in chapter 5 and of a 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian in chapter 4. However, these readings are presented as a means to contribute to a utopian and dystopian reading of the biblical passage, rather than as an end in themselves.

Reader response approaches to the Bible have been described as a recent and postmodern method in biblical criticism. In 1995 Clines pointed out in the book *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*<sup>99</sup> that previous biblical commentaries often focused on the creators of biblical texts, not on its readers, and that in biblical commentaries there seemed to be a lack of reflexive awareness that when writing a commentary, oneself acts as a reader of a biblical text.<sup>100</sup> From the same book one can draw a phrase that describes a reading from a “flipped” perspective. Clines calls reading biblical narratives from the perspective of Canaanites, for example, “reading against the grain”; reading “with the grain” would be a reading which generally approves of biblical ideas such as choosing one specific people for divine blessing.<sup>101</sup>

The members of “The Bible and Culture Collective” offer a comprehensive survey of reader response criticism in relation to biblical studies in *The Postmodern Bible*<sup>102</sup> (1995). The authors point out what the rise of reader response in literary studies may mean to biblical studies: biblical reader response critics, they say, are still concerned with a dichotomy “text” versus “reader” and their aim is to study the meaning of a text rather than explicitly and exclusively studying the reading by a reader.<sup>103</sup> In this sense, while the reader plays an important role in a utopian reading, such a reading of a biblical passage is not “pure” reader response, as it is concerned with the text and its fluctuating potentials and meanings in the interplay with the reader. Furthermore the authors of the volume conjecture that scholars in biblical studies may not have seriously

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<sup>99</sup> David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 205 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>102</sup> The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 53.

engaged with reader response approaches in the past because this approach would mean to assess one's own hermeneutic presuppositions.<sup>104</sup> The utopian reading does, as the authors of *The Postmodern Bible* state, reflexively assess its own hermeneutical approach.

Chapter 6 of this thesis offers a reading akin to a reading “against the grain”, and shows specifically how both ways of reading the biblical passage are possible, arguing that there are more than two directions (“against” and “with”), and – indebted to the idea of the ideal type – proposes to measure such directions in sliding scales rather than absolutes.

Powell, in his book *Chasing the Eastern Star: Adventures in Biblical Reader-Response Criticism*<sup>105</sup> (2001) states that his reason for exploring this approach is derived from a concern that “correct” interpretation (which for many might still be attempting to unravel an elusive author's intention) might be the exclusive property of an educated elite, which might dictate meaning to all readers of the Bible.

Similar issues are addressed in a number of books drawn upon in chapter 5, for example in *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World*<sup>106</sup> (1987) by Nancy T. Ammerman, *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism*<sup>107</sup> (1990) by Kathleen C. Boone, *Words Upon the Word: An Ethnography of Evangelical Group Bible Study*<sup>108</sup> (2009) by James S. Bielo.

What these works have in common is, of course, that they engage with contemporary readers of the Bible in a society which has been described by sociologists such as Ulrich Beck as “post-secular”, meaning essentially that spirituality and religious beliefs have become more individualised and gained significant independence from institutions. Gauging the extent to which interpretations by groups of Bible readers are individualised or backed by interpretations by institutions are part of the analyses presented in these works.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>105</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star: Adventures in Biblical Reader-Response Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 3-4.

<sup>106</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

<sup>107</sup> Kathleen C. Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1990).

<sup>108</sup> James S. Bielo, *Words Upon the Word: An Ethnography of Evangelical Group Bible Study* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

Chapter 5 engages with the anachronism of drawing on these contemporary works to analyse a pre-modern reading of the Bible.

## 2. Utopia as an Ideal Type

### *Chapter summary*

This chapter proposes to use an ideal type to approach the concept of utopia. First, characteristic traits of utopia, dystopia, and science fiction by scholars are presented, and it is pointed out that relying on strict definitions may limit the discussion to superficial surveys of genre-poetics. Characteristics of the genres, I maintain, are subject to such fluctuations that a strict definition of utopia, dystopia, or science fiction may not be the most useful. Hence, it is advocated to use a flexible ideal type to look at utopia in the Bible for at least two reasons: an ideal type is not a strict definition that would exclude the possibility of other readings, and using an ideal type helps to overcome the problem that the Bible pre-dates the invention of utopia by Thomas More in 1516.

This thesis aims to demonstrate that strict categories are often not useful since they are not universal and not observed by every reader. Different categories and readings exist side by side. Therefore this chapter argues, drawing on “A Cyborg Manifesto” by Donna Haraway, that the strict division into categories is not helpful and that the use of an ideal type is a more constructive approach. Examples of an ideal type methodology and counter examples are given, in which stricter frameworks of definition are used. The chapter attempts to gauge an ideal type of utopia that is appropriate for use with the Bible.

One stable definitive feature is that a utopia is a juxtaposition of an imagined state of being with circumstances in reality. The ideal type of a (biblical) utopia might include several dimensions: the connection between reality and the utopia, the socio-political climate at the time of writing, whether utopia is understood as a call to action or understood only as a literary fiction or heuristic device, and how religion relates to utopia. This chapter maintains that these factors vary and that the fact that each reader perceives each dimension differently adds to the difficulty of finding a definition of utopia.

## 2.1. Characteristic traits of utopia, dystopia, and science fiction

In order to show clearly how approaching a cultural phenomenon such as utopian literature as an ideal type differs from previous work, which often approaches literary genres by listing recurring features, describing developmental interrelatedness, or defining it by contrast to other literary genres, I am going to survey existing definitions and observations.

Lyman Tower Sargent's strategy to define utopia is classificatory. As a first step to approach the phenomenon, he introduced the "Three Faces of Utopianism"<sup>109</sup>, utopian literature, utopian thought or philosophy, and utopian intentional communities or social experiments. He defines all three strands of utopia in broad terms in the following way:

Utopias are generally oppositional, reflecting at the minimum frustration with things as they are and the desire for a better life. Many utopias remain little more than expression of such frustrations while others directly challenge the current state of affairs with proposals for how it should be changed.<sup>110</sup>

Sargent admits that even though the term utopia was invented by Thomas More, earlier texts exist which exhibit the same oppositional expression of a desire for a better life and an improved society, among them passages in the Hebrew Bible. Sargent engages with the difficulty of defining utopia, which he says is a task "frequently ignored by scholars in the field".<sup>111</sup> This is a tendency in much material about utopia and the Bible, too. Steven Schweitzer and Roland Boer<sup>112</sup> are exceptions to the tendency of not engaging with a definition of utopia before applying the concept.

Manuel & Manuel, Sargent writes, "make the unfortunate statement that they do not need to define utopia; they know one when they see one."<sup>113</sup> As will be seen below, in section 2.5, Manuel & Manuel actually offer many statements that one can engage with when attempting to pinpoint key features of the genre:

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<sup>109</sup> Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited."

<sup>110</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent, "Utopian Traditions: Themes and Variations," in *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World* (New York: New York Public Library, 2000).

<sup>111</sup> Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," 2.

<sup>112</sup> Schweitzer, *Reading Utopia in Chronicles*; Boer, *Novel Histories*.

<sup>113</sup> Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," 2.

utopias are often produced in times of social change, they are often produced in non-dominant classes, and they are most often written artefacts.

Sargent defines utopia as follows: “Utopia – a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space.”<sup>114</sup> An important and frequently cited definition of literary utopias comes from Darko Suvin and is deemed the most useful for this thesis as it is the one most closely resembling what I will call the ideal type of utopia:

Utopia is the verbal construction of a quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community, this construction being based on the estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis.<sup>115</sup>

Schweitzer embarks from Suvin’s definition and Sargent’s categorisation utopian literature, philosophy, and practice. While drawing on Sargent’s and Suvin’s work myself, in the present chapter I am going to suggest a way in which one can draw on the work of these authorities without essentialising the open-ended phenomenon of utopia. Literary utopias are still being produced, so definitions must remain flexible to accommodate the newest additions to the canon.

Some confusion exists about the definitions of anti-utopia and dystopia. I generally agree with Sargent in defining dystopia as follows:

A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of that contemporary society.<sup>116</sup>

As I am going to detail in chapter 5, while this definition can be useful as an introductory statement, it does not accommodate the problem that arises when utopias are displaced in time or attempted to be enforced against a community’s will. A well-intended utopia, as Carol Farley Kessler points out,<sup>117</sup> can appear as a dystopia in later times. Hence, I agree with Margaret Atwood, that utopias

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>115</sup> Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 49.

<sup>116</sup> Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” 9.

<sup>117</sup> Carol Farley Kessler, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress toward Utopia with Selected Writings* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 45.

often contain latent dystopias.<sup>118</sup> Anti-utopias, as opposed to dystopias, critique utopianism itself.<sup>119</sup>

A definitive framework to differentiate between common traits of utopia as opposed to science fiction has been approached by Suvin and Sargent as well. In Sargent's classification of genres and subgenres, science fiction is a subgenre of utopia, because "utopias are clearly the primary root."<sup>120</sup> Sargent himself admits that defining boundaries of genres is problematic, but that "without boundaries, we do not have a subject."<sup>121</sup> The approach to difficulties with definition outlined below will help to remedy this shortcoming of artificially drawn boundaries.

Suvin differentiates between utopia and science fiction by saying that utopia is a fiction that deals with improved socio-political circumstances, whereas science fiction's key feature is a changed biology<sup>122</sup>— this might be a different planet, significantly changed environmental circumstances on earth, or alien life-forms.

Utopia and science fiction have in common that they juxtapose a significantly changed imaginary world to the world the reader experiences. A helpful approach to defining what might be considered a science fiction text is Suvin's concept of the "novum", which is a definitive trait of science fiction. In short, the "novum" is the key feature that exists in the imagined science fiction world, which makes the fictional environment different from the reader's empirical environment.<sup>123</sup> The "novum" is a more sophisticated and flexible approach to science fiction than stating that science fiction must feature as yet unavailable technology. The idea of the "novum" is a useful definitive framework when approaching science fiction literature.

However, as Margaret Atwood discusses in the introduction to *In Other Worlds*, defining science fiction – and by extension literary genres in general – may be a superfluous exercise, because the only person likely to agree with a

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<sup>118</sup> Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 66.

<sup>119</sup> Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," 9. I engage with this distinction again in 6.1.3 and 6.1.4.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>121</sup> Sargent, "Utopian Traditions: Themes and Variations," 12.

<sup>122</sup> Suvin, "Theses on Dystopia 2001," 188.

<sup>123</sup> Suvin, *Defined by a Hollow*. The idea of the "novum" as a definitive feature of science fiction is discussed in chapter 3 of Suvin's book.



given definition is its author. Atwood refers to a review by Ursula K. Le Guin, in which Le Guin says that Atwood would prefer if her work were not “shove[d...] into the literary ghetto”, and that a definition of science fiction as “‘fiction in which things happen that are not possible today’” is “arbitrarily restrictive”.<sup>124</sup> In the following I propose to approach a cultural phenomenon, such as a literary genre, by constructing an ideal type. This is deemed especially useful for the undertaking of attempting to discuss a biblical passage informed by the concept of utopia.

## 2.2. *Ideals and ideal type*

In his article “Religious Narrative, Post-secularism and Utopia” Vincent Geoghegan proposes to continue critical work begun as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>125</sup> to overcome the so-called antinomies of “secular” and religious” in reading the Bible: “The challenge is to go beyond this particular structure of ideologies and, deploying a variety of reading techniques, read the biblical narrative afresh.”<sup>126</sup> His examples of such “fresh” readings include feminist, queer, or post-colonial readings. The eclectic readings I am presenting here of the case study passage Numbers 13, unified by the concept of utopia as a reading strategy,<sup>127</sup> align with the “post-secular” Bible reading project as Geoghegan describes it in this article.

As advocated by Geoghegan, I do not look at categories as mutually exclusive, but rather as integrated, oscillating, and dependent upon each other (in sometimes surprising ways): “There has been, of late, a spate of ‘playful’ readings of the Bible. The wish to play with the biblical text, to take, literally,

<sup>124</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Year of the Flood by Margaret Atwood,” *The Guardian*, August 29, 2009, sec. Culture, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/aug/29/margaret-atwood-year-of-flood>. Accessed 20th December, 2013.

<sup>125</sup> “The antecedents of a post-secularist response can perhaps be traced back to the nineteenth century, when a perception of the damage inflicted by the secularism/Christianity divide prompted thinkers and artists as varied as Carlyle and Swinburne, Butler and Ruskin to seek ways to overcome the split; for Carlyle, ‘the two half-men’ of the eighteenth century represented by the ‘scientific’ Hume and the reverent Samuel Johnson, needed to be integrated into a ‘whole man of a new time’ (Wilson, 1999, p.60).” Geoghegan, “Religious Narrative, Post-Secularism and Utopia,” 206.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>127</sup> Different contemporary approaches, or reading strategies, such as feminist reading, structuralism, deconstructionism, or materialism are applied to Esther in David J. A. Clines, “Reading Esther from Left to Right,” in *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967-1998* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 3–22.

liberties with it, does lend itself to the Utopian enterprise.”<sup>128</sup> To an extent, there is an initial playfulness to the readings offered here. But they are – under the surface – not fun and games. They are, rather, a demonstration of what can conceivably be done to the Bible in this “post-secular” world, where it can be transformed from a revered ancient artefact into a raging, unpredictable alien.

This chapter is dedicated to exploring in detail what an ideal type of utopia might entail, and why looking at utopia and other categories (such as audiences) as ideal types is a useful approach in biblical studies. In order to construct an ideal type, existing definitions of utopia are presented, for example one by Darko Suvin and one by Kenneth Roemer. I draw upon other literary theorists as well as upon primary utopian literature to demonstrate that a phenomenon such as utopia might be too fluctuant to be captured in a strict definition. The phenomenon changes, so must its definitions. Elements which were found to be integral to the ideal type of utopia are that it juxtaposes a fictional world with an implied reality, that very often it employs the plot device of a traveller who encounters a world unfamiliar to her or him, and that there exists a dissonance between the fictional world and the world a reader of the fiction inhabits.

In order to overcome the anachronism of reading the Bible as a utopia, one can rely on a comparative approach, sometimes called a “family resemblance” approach. The ideal type is an overarching idea to which phenomena can be compared in order to highlight differences and similarities between the ideal type and a particular phenomenon. A family resemblance, for example between a biblical image and an image found in a utopia from a later era, is the element which initiates the comparison.

Utopias are descriptions of fictional societies. In classically structured utopias such as *Looking Backward*, *Erewhon*, *New Atlantis*, or *Herland* a naïve traveller is taken on a tour of the ideal society by a native utopian guide. In some utopias, long dialogues between traveller and guide attempt to address all aspects of the fictional society (in fact, of course, all aspects the author thought of as important). These dialogues portray individual instances as paradigmatic or state directly that particular aspects of life never change.<sup>129</sup> The impression

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<sup>128</sup> “Geoghegan, “Religious Narrative, Post-Secularism and Utopia,” 213.

<sup>129</sup> The model for this paradigmatic way of description is supplied by Thomas More: “As for their cities, whoso knoweth one of them knoweth them all, they be all so like one to another as

thus conveyed to the reader is that every individual in the utopian land behaves exactly the same or exactly like the utopian guide. This paradigmatic demonstration shows that the description of social fictions in utopias is concerned mainly with how life is generally conducted in the utopia.

More's *Utopia* structures the description of the fictional society encyclopaedically, sorted by themes, starting with geography and cities, moving on to regional government, trade and business, and ending with issues on family life and religion.

Whether written as a story about a paradigmatic utopian family the traveller gets to know, as in *Looking Backward* and *Erewhon*, or written as a catalogue, like *Utopia*, the utopian society is described in orderly and static categories. Later anti-utopias or dystopias demonstrate, sometimes satirically, how the rigorous application of static regimes governed by one overarching principle, such as the principle of reason in Zamyatin's *We*, may build a totalitarian dictatorial dystopia in which defiance of categories, individual difference, or critique of the status quo is punishable.

Paradoxically, utopian literature and utopian thought are often fenced in in sets of categories proposed by scholars, who attempt to draw up definitions, dichotomies,<sup>130</sup> genres, and subgenres<sup>131</sup> to make sense of the varied phenomenon of utopia in its many manifestations. In order to overcome the limitation of categories, dichotomous or polychotomous, I will adapt the sociological ideal type methodology to approach the concept of utopia.

Bryan Wilson writes,

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far forth as the nature of the place permitteth. I will describe, therefore, to you one or other of them, for it skillet not greatly which, but which rather than Amaurote? Of them all this is the worthiest and of most dignity." Thomas More, Francis Bacon, and Henry Neville, *Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia, New Atlantis and The Isle of Pines*, ed. Susan Bruce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 52–53. Fashion is one aspect often described in utopias as un-changing: "For their garments, which throughout all the island be of one fashion [...], and this continueth for evermore unchanged, seemly and comely to the eye, no let to the moving and wielding of the body, also fit both for winter and summer [...]" Ibid., 57. Or: "Now, sir, in their apparel mark (I pray you) how few workmen they need. First of all, whiles they be at work they be covered homely with leather or skins that will last seven years. When they go forth abroad they cast upon them a cloak which hideth the other homely apparel. These cloaks throughout the whole island be all of one colour, and that is the natural colour of wool." Ibid., 61.

<sup>130</sup> "Ideology" versus "Utopia" is such a dichotomy found for example in Marx, Engels, and Mannheim.

<sup>131</sup> Darko Suvin and Lyman Tower Sargent are scholars who have dedicated much thought to the poetics of utopia and to defining classifications of genres and subgenres.

Definitive formulations are not part of my prospectus of sociological theory. Conceptualization is indispensable to the sociological enterprise, of course, but no one conceptual framework is indispensable. The end sought is not the subsumption and encapsulation of all reality in a set of (therefore necessarily tautological) formulae, but the interpretation of reality by principles of greater generality than are to be derived from a particular case, and by the conscious application of comparative method.<sup>132</sup>

In this sense, rather than establishing one definition that would be true for all examples of utopia or attempting to categorise a set of utopias into a strict definitive framework, an ideal type can be drawn up. Each particular case of a written utopia can be compared to the ideal type in order to gain insight into the degree to which a text might be utopian.<sup>133</sup> This method is most appropriate for many reasons. It can help to overcome the ethical difficulties with handling the utopian impulse (if there is such a thing). If we were to define utopia strictly as an improved society, the definition would cease to be true if the proposed experiment of creating an improved society fails or turns into an oppressive dictatorship, and we might be happier defining utopia as the *idea* of an improved society, not its realisation.

Using a flexible approach to the concept is relevant to the application of the concept of utopia to the Bible. First of all, thinking of utopia as an ideal type, the Bible will not be disqualified from a discussion as utopia because it pre-dates the invention of the term. Secondly, using a diachronic ideal type of utopia, which is flexible enough to incorporate a number of estranged or dystopian readings which may only be utopian to some degree, will show how relevant and dangerous the Bible remains even today.

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<sup>132</sup> Bryan R. Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium: Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest among Tribal and Third-world Peoples* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 3.

<sup>133</sup> The use of ideal types to approach the concept of “sect” has been discussed more often than the use of ideal types to approach “utopia”, but the advantages of the procedure are the same: “An ideal typical procedure is to be preferred since it enables the researcher to cut through some of the Gordian knots of comparative analysis, since what is taking place is not the creation of a full classification of all ‘sects’ that ever existed (which requires constant revision of the sect concept as each and every case is considered); rather, instances of sectarian organisation and behaviour are to be compared against the ideal type, which facilitates the making of judgments and comparisons on the basis of how much like the ideal type the particular instance is felt to be: hence highlighting ‘degrees of sectarianism’ and also raising questions as to why certain features are more or less present and dominant at particular times in particular contexts as demonstrated for the specific case measured against the ideal type.” David Chalcraft, “Is a Historical Comparative Sociology of (Ancient Jewish) Sects Possible?,” in *Sects and Sectarianism in Jewish History*, ed. Sacha Stern (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 253.

I want to bring Isaiah Berlin and Donna Haraway into a dialogue here to establish the epistemological framework of this thesis and to comment briefly on the utopian impulse and the importance of acknowledging and embracing the failure of categories. Haraway's statement, "This chapter is an argument for the *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction"<sup>134</sup> can be considered the implicit epigraph to this thesis. Haraway's essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" is concerned with recognising the dangers and limitations of dichotomies and constructed categories.

None of "us" have any longer the symbolic or material capability of dictating the shape of reality to any of "them". Or at least "we" cannot claim innocence from practising such dominations. White women, including socialist feminists, discovered (that is, were forced kicking and screaming to notice) the non-innocence of the category "woman". That consciousness changes the geography of all previous categories; it denatures them as heat denatures a fragile protein. Cyborg feminists have to argue that "we" do not want any more natural matrix of unity and that no construction is whole.<sup>135</sup>

This statement is transferable when we are speaking about the use of exclusive definitions, sometimes used exclusively within a specific academic discipline. Being strict and exclusive about defining concepts as inherently elusive as utopia might derail the discussion.

Haraway's statement resonates with Isaiah Berlin<sup>136</sup> writing about the impossible imagined ideal of an achievable utopia, which presupposes an original unity to which humanity can return. The fundamental flaw in believing in the possibility of an achieved utopia, Berlin says, is to assume that there is a set of unchanging values and ideals that are the same for everybody at all times.<sup>137</sup> This assumption, he says, goes hand in hand with the assumption that there is one correct answer to every genuine question. Such assumptions are found with some variations in writings by Tolstoy and Rousseau, but also crucially in texts such as the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," 150.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>136</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (London: Pimlico, 2003), especially chapters one and two. Berlin's writing on utopian ideals is mentioned in Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies*, 9.

<sup>137</sup> Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 3.

At some point I realised that what all these views had in common was a Platonic ideal: in the first place, that, as in the sciences, all genuine questions must have one true answer and one only, all the rest being necessarily errors; in the second place, that there must be a dependable path towards the discovery of these truths; in the third place, that the true answers, when found, must necessarily be compatible with one another and form a single whole, for one truth cannot be incompatible with another [...].<sup>139</sup>

The ideal type, though it might seem conceptually close to a Platonic ideal, does not refer to the ideal as in “a perfect example” of a phenomenon. It allows us to use multidimensional sliding scales to measure the many dimensions of a phenomenon rather than using strict exclusive categories, which might claim that anything outside of these categories is not “correct”, thereby derailing a contribution that might bring forward important ideas. In this way the ideal type procedure fits in with Berlin’s idea of pluralism,<sup>140</sup> and Haraway’s advocating to embrace pluralism and to disregard the myths of “naturalness” or “original unity”.

### 2.3. *What is an ideal type?*

The method of constructing an ideal type to which phenomena can be compared was described by Max Weber as a sociological method to be preferred to the empirical methods used by others. Comparing phenomena to an ideal type would allow the researcher to analyse “fuzzy” subjects in historical comparison.<sup>141</sup> An ideal type, as opposed to a general definition, does justice to a concept that is manifest in a variety of different genres, eras, or modes of

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 5–6. This passage from Berlin’s essay is also cited in Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies*, 9.

<sup>140</sup> “Berlin thought that the best that could be done would be to strive for a pluralistic society in which people would be socialized to accept that there exist different and sometimes competing ideas about the ideal, and to remember the record of devastation and horror brought on by efforts to suppress or destroy those differences.” Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies*, 10.

<sup>141</sup> “[...] For the knowledge of historical phenomena in their concreteness, the most general laws, because they are most devoid of content are also the least valuable. The more comprehensive the validity, – or scope – of a term, the more it leads us away from the richness of reality since in order to include the common elements of the largest possible number of phenomena, it must necessarily be as abstract as possible and hence *devoid* of content. In the cultural sciences, the knowledge of the universal or general is never valuable in itself.” Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York: Free Press, 1949), 80.

expression. The construct of the ideal type, which may resemble a case but is not identical with any one particular case, is used to research the particular.

One might approach the ideal type by surveying samples of a phenomenon, in this case utopian literature, and what has been said about the phenomenon by researchers.<sup>142</sup> In the case of utopia, this would mean surveying a range of utopian texts and secondary material about utopia. Since utopia is a wide field, it is narrowed down in this thesis by predominantly considering utopia in its manifestation of literary fictions. That is, the manifestation of the concept of utopia in utopian communities, such as the Owenites communities of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, or the concept of utopia as used in Marx' and Engels' writings will play a side-role.

An example of the "tautological formulae"<sup>143</sup> mentioned by Wilson, is given by Lyman Tower Sargent, who appears to try to do exactly what Wilson might understand as counter-ideal-typical. Sargent charts the genre of utopia. His chart, or taxonomy, appears to attempt to map all manifestations of literary utopias in a set of categories. He introduces the chart by saying that it is possible to draw up other categorisations based on other principles, and he acknowledges that the categorisation may not be complete.<sup>144</sup> The ideal type does not contribute to the seemingly never-ending endeavour of mapping and re-mapping utopian literature.

Haraway writes about a very different type of taxonomy. However, her critique of taxonomies is transferable:

[Katie] King criticizes the persistent tendency among contemporary feminists from different "movements" or "conversations" in feminist practice to taxonomize the women's movement to make one's own political tendencies appear to be the *telos* of the whole. These taxonomies tend to remake feminist history so that it appears to be an ideological struggle among coherent types persisting over time, especially those typical units called radical, liberal, and socialist-

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<sup>142</sup> "While not being in existence in reality in the form articulated and emphasised by its creator, the ideal type is based on aspects of reality that have been observed by researchers." Chalcraft, "Is a Historical Comparative Sociology of (Ancient Jewish) Sects Possible?," 253.

<sup>143</sup> Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium*, 3.

<sup>144</sup> Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," 11–12. Sargent subdivides utopia into three main categories, "Myth", "Fiction", and "Non-Fiction". Within "Myth" there are seven subcategories, such as "Myths of an earthly paradise", "heaven and hell" or "Prester John tales". Within "Fiction", there are 11 subcategories, two of which are subdivided yet further. Within the category "Non-Fiction", there are 9 subcategories, including "Urban planning" or "Political philosophy".

feminism. Literally, all other feminisms are either incorporated or marginalized, usually by building an explicit ontology and epistemology. Taxonomies of feminism produce epistemologies to police deviation from official women's experience.<sup>145</sup>

This ideal typical approach to utopian literature and utopian thought acknowledges and draws upon work such as Lyman Tower Sargent's and other authors' who have attempted to define the phenomenon of utopia. Ultimately, I will not endeavour to unify varying definitions. No one definition of utopia will be presented as more "correct" or more "applicable" than another. Thereby, I hope to be able to dissolve very strict or dogmatic definitions respectfully in order to propose a more-than-dichotomous approach to utopia. This would allow us to see the value of each definition against the background of the circumstances of its creation and the issues, with which its author was primarily concerned.

It is recognised that a definitive characteristic of utopias is their variance. This variance could be due to utopias being often literary and as such subject to an author's creativity and individualism, which may be restrained and influenced by conventions of a certain historic era. Levitas paraphrases Georges Sorel's perspective on the mutability of utopias and on the blurry boundaries of the genre (here the boundary between utopia and myth):

Utopias do not have to be treated as generic wholes in the same way as myths, since their elements are at least in theory separable and reforms may be carried out piecemeal; they may be dismembered and their elements are subject to potential refutation by facts. However, if utopia and myth may be contrasted at the level of definition and analysis, in practice they may be interwoven; these are ideal types in Max Weber's sense, so that actual utopias may contain myths, and myths may contain utopian elements.<sup>146</sup>

The fluidity of the genre of utopia is expressed here, and an ideal type approach to the phenomenon is advocated. One sample of utopia may contain elements that another sample will not contain, which is unsurprising in a term that has been used to refer to texts from as early as the beginnings of human

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<sup>145</sup> Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," 156.

<sup>146</sup> Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 65.



literary production.<sup>147</sup> It makes sense to discuss the extent to which a sample may be utopian rather than making decisions on whether it is utopian or not if it lacks a particular aspect or exhibits an unusual feature.<sup>148</sup>

Karl Mannheim has proposed an ideal type of utopia, following Weber, in *Ideologie und Utopie* (first published in 1929; first English translation published in 1936).<sup>149</sup> Mannheim distinguishes between ideology and utopia according to social function, as Weber might have distinguished between “church” and “sect”. Ideology, according to Mannheim, is aimed at sustaining the status quo, while utopia proposes to change it. Within the category of utopia Mannheim distinguishes four sub-categories that differ from each other in their organizing principle of “orientation to, and experience of, time [...]”.<sup>150</sup>

These are, first, “the orgiastic chiasm of the Anabaptists”,<sup>151</sup> that is the idea of the possibility of a “millennial kingdom on earth”,<sup>152</sup> not so much located in the future but in the present.<sup>153</sup> The second category is the “liberal-humanitarian idea”,<sup>154</sup> which arose as a critique of present circumstances. It does not seek to implement a concrete plan for the future but is concerned with the *idea* of possible change to mirror current circumstances. Mannheim calls the third category “the conservative idea”.<sup>155</sup> This does not seek to change the present, nor does it have a progressive impulse. The fourth category is the “socialist-communist utopia”,<sup>156</sup> which, as opposed to the liberal utopia, regards

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<sup>147</sup> Jack Sasson, for example, has used the concept of utopia to discuss texts from the ancient city state of Mari. Jack M. Sasson, “Utopian and Dystopian Images in Mari Prophetic Texts,” in *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi (Helsinki; Göttingen: Finnish Exegetical Society; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 27–40.

<sup>148</sup> “The question is less one of, is this a sect or not – as one of ‘how much’ of a sect is it?” Chalcraft, “Is a Historical Comparative Sociology of (Ancient Jewish) Sects Possible?,” 254.

<sup>149</sup> “Therefore we will be concerned here with concrete thinking, acting, and feeling and their inner connections in concrete types of men. The pure types and stages of the Utopian mind are constructions only in so far as they are conceived of as ideal-types. No single individual represents a pure embodiment of any one of the historical-social types of mentality here presented.” Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1954), 189.

<sup>150</sup> Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 70.

<sup>151</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 190.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

the future utopia as a more concretely determined point in time, “namely the period of the breakdown of capitalist culture”.<sup>157</sup>

Mannheim adopts Weber’s ideal type approach but uses different concepts. Mannheim distinguishes between utopia and ideology according to social function; Weber distinguishes between church and sect by membership in a church being compulsory and membership in a sect being voluntary. Mannheim’s classification of utopia into categories according to the principle of each category’s “orientation to, and experience of, time”<sup>158</sup> resonates with Weber’s survey of different protestant sects’ understandings of vocational calling and pre-determination, which he discusses in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>159</sup> Mannheim’s categorisation by “orientation to, and experience of, time” is reminiscent of Wilson’s application of the ideal type to categorise sects using the principle of different responses to the world.

Even ideal types can be treated as ideal types, because they, too, exhibit degrees of change. For example, it has been pointed out that Weber’s ideal type is more interrogative than classificatory, whereas Wilson’s types are classificatory rather than interrogative.<sup>160</sup> An ideal type and governing principle (“responses to the world”, “orientation to, and experience of time”) not only depend on which phenomenon is to be investigated and how, but also depends on the historical placement of the investigation. Wilson, as opposed to Weber, writes from the point of view of a more secular society, in which membership in a church would probably not have been called compulsory. He seeks an

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>158</sup> The Chiliasts regard the present as vital: “The only true, perhaps the only direct, identifying characteristic of Chiliastic experience is absolute presentness.” A utopia might suddenly break into the presence at any time. Ibid., 193. The liberal-humanitarian utopia is connected to the present but oriented towards the future, using the idea of a historical evolution. Its utopia “is the ‘idea’”. This, however, is not the static platonic idea of the Greek tradition, which was a concrete archetype, a primal model of things; but here the idea is rather conceived of as a formal goal projected into the finite future whose function it is to act as a mere regulative device in mundane affairs.” Ibid., 195. The present is seen as “the embodiment of the highest values and meanings” in the “conservative idea”. Ibid., 209. The socialist-communist utopia is sought at a more concrete time in the future. It is less of an idea than liberal utopia, and rather concerned with “the material aspects of existence.” Ibid., 217.

<sup>159</sup> “We can only proceed by examining the religious ideas as ideal types, namely, as constructed concepts endowed with a degree of consistency seldom found in actual history. Precisely because of the impossibility of drawing sharp boundaries in historical reality, our only hope of identifying the particular effects of these religious ideas must come through an investigation of their most consistent [or ‘ideal’] forms.” Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Los Angeles: Roxbury, 2001), 55.

<sup>160</sup> Chalcraft, “Is a Historical Comparative Sociology of (Ancient Jewish) Sects Possible?,” 256.

approach “freed from specific Christian connotations to make it applicable to a wider, more diversified range of phenomena.”<sup>161</sup> Mannheim’s Weberian approach to utopia is also influenced by the era of his investigation. Mannheim uses the ideology/utopia distinction to investigate the sociology of knowledge. The historical background<sup>162</sup> and Mannheim’s understanding of utopia as an epistemology but also as a constructive tool for the conscious realistic shaping of the future of society<sup>163</sup> come into play in his ideal typical approach.

The creators of ideal types draw up their frameworks from particular points of view, so do the theorists who propose definitions of utopia. The readers of utopias, of social phenomena, or of the Bible are as difficult to define and assess as the phenomena they are concerned with. Therefore, I propose to regard readers (of utopias or of the Bible) as constantly changing diachronic groups as well, granting them their individualisms, variance, and unpredictability in the process by which they seek to create meaning between themselves and texts.

In chapter 5, which is concerned with a reading of Numbers 13 by readers I call “committed readers” (Bradford and Mather), I revisit the idea of the Bible reader as an ideal type and provide an ideal typical framework for different perspectives from which an ideal typical “committed reader” might approach a biblical text.

#### **2.4. Family resemblances and anachronisms**

The utopian genres and subgenres proposed by Lyman Tower Sargent exhibit family resemblance. Although they may range from fiction to non-fiction and within those categories cover such diverse manifestations as urban planning,

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<sup>161</sup> Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium*, 18.

<sup>162</sup> “The original German edition of *Ideology and Utopia* appeared in an atmosphere of acute intellectual tension marked by widespread discussion which subsided only with the exile or enforced silence of those thinkers who sought an honest and tenable solution to the problems raised.” Louis Wirth in his introduction to Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, xiii.

<sup>163</sup> Mannheim sees the “utopian element” as an important transformative force in history and fears the future disappearance of utopia. “The disappearance of utopia brings about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing. We would be faced with the greatest paradox imaginable, namely, that man, who has achieved the highest degree of rational mastery of existence, left without any ideals, becomes a mere creature of impulses. Thus, after a long and tortuous, but heroic development, just at the highest stage of awareness, when history is ceasing to be blind fate, and is becoming more and more man’s own creation, with the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it.” Ibid., 236.

music, myths of heaven and hell, imaginary voyages or science fiction,<sup>164</sup> a family resemblance between them is the unifying principle. The expression “family resemblance” is often found when ideal type methodologies are used or discussed. Examples can be drawn from different eras in history or different geographical locations, but still exhibit “family resemblance”.<sup>165</sup>

It has been pointed out that using ideal types to discuss a phenomenon is precisely valuable because it allows us to highlight differences between a particular case and the ideal type to investigate possible influencing factors:

[...] In the comparison of phenomena the methodology utilised is not intended to collect all examples of “the same thing” but to compare examples which evidence a family resemblance from different periods as *critical instances* of the phenomena that can be used to gauge degrees of change and provide the evidence for accounting for the rate and type of changes that have taken place.<sup>166</sup>

The final chapter of this thesis takes this statement literally and highlights family resemblances between *Star Trek* and other works of science fiction, and the biblical passage Numbers 13. This consciously anachronistic approach displaces the biblical text in time to investigate ideological and epistemological mechanisms.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” 11–12.

<sup>165</sup> Discussing domination and slavery, Scott writes, to pre-empt accusations of having too broad a scope of samples: “I do not intend to make ‘essentialist’ assertions about the immutable characteristics of slaves, serfs, untouchables, the colonized, or subjugated races. What I do want to claim, however, is that similar structures of domination, other things equal, tend to provoke responses and forms of resistance that also bear a family resemblance to one another. My analysis therefore, is one that runs roughshod over differences and specific conditions that others would consider essential, in order to sketch the outlines of broad approach.” James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 21–22.

<sup>166</sup> Chalcraft, “Is a Historical Comparative Sociology of (Ancient Jewish) Sects Possible?,” 247.

<sup>167</sup> The underlying conviction here is that the text changes profoundly depending on cultural situation and temporal placement: “The texts may remain, everything else changes; and therefore the texts are changed.” Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold*, 63. This thought is also expressed in “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*” and “Kafka and His Precursors” both in Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. James E. Irby and Donald A. Yates (London: Penguin, 1970). In “Pierre Menard” an anonymous narrator introduces the work of a fictional thinker, whose main achievement – according to the narrator – was to write a fragmentary, but exact *Don Quixote* (not a copy of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, as the narrator emphasizes, but *the Quixote*). Although the fragments are identical with Cervantes’ *Quixote*, Menard’s re-writing is considered by the narrator to be richer than Cervantes’ text. The linguistic achievement of Menard to write in a dated register of a language that is not his own is praised and we are told that the meaning of the text is changed dramatically, by displacing it in time. Attribution and meaning become so arbitrary, that the narrator is convinced he has found traces of Pierre Menard’s style in chapters of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* that are missing from Pierre

There is, of course, an anachronism when we are drawing on modern forms or theories to “read the Bible as” something it is not traditionally perceived to be.<sup>168</sup> But here the family resemblances are seen as ahistorical, so that in the ideal type approach two phenomena can be brought into a direct dialogue, even if one could never have been aware of the other (i.e. the biblical authors of *Star Trek*). The two phenomena meet in the reader.

Readers who read Numbers 13 after Thomas More (theoretically any reader after 1516) will see that the passage exhibits a motif that is found in *Utopia* and has been maintained in other utopias: travellers travel to an unfamiliar land, explore its distinctiveness, and return to report on the differences between their home society and the land they have explored. Throughout this thesis it will become clear in which instances the biblical passage does and in which it does not keep matching general traits found in utopias and science fiction. The journey of Numbers 13 is not merely an exploration but a survey before a conquest. It is not an unambiguous utopia either, because it mixes utopian and dystopian images.

## 2.5. *Using an ideal type to read utopia in the Bible*

Most scholars investigating utopia as literature or as an impulse link it to classical Greek works such as Plato’s *Laws* and *The Republic* (this link is made explicit in Thomas More’s *Utopia*), and to the Bible.<sup>169</sup> The obvious anachronism of seeing utopian themes in the Bible is simply that the utopian convention or genre was not invented as such until *Utopia*, and it seems as

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Menard’s fragmentary *Quixote*. Darko Suvin calls the idea that a text changes its meaning when it is chronologically displaced the “The Pierre Menard’ syndrome or law” in Suvin, “Theses on Dystopia 2001,” 190. T.S. Eliot advocates the periodical reappraisal of a cultural canon, due to perspective changes: “What we observe is partly the same scene, but in a different and more distant perspective; there are new and strange objects in the foreground, to be drawn accurately in proportion to the more familiar ones which now approach the horizon, where all but the most eminent become invisible to the naked eye.” T.S. Eliot, *Points of View* (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), 11.

<sup>168</sup> This is not usually considered to be prohibitively problematic, for example by those reading Bible as utopia: Steven Schweitzer, *Reading Utopia in Chronicles* (T & T Clark International, 2009). Boer, *Novel Histories*. Aichele and Pippin, *Violence, Utopia, and the Kingdom of God*.

<sup>169</sup> Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, 33. Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). Boer, *Novel Histories*, 122. Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 65. Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies*. Vita Fortunati, “The Metamorphosis of the Apocalyptic Myth: From Utopia to Science Fiction,” in *Utopias and the Millennium*, ed. Stephen Bann and Krishan Kumar (London: Reaktion, 1993), 82.

though the Bible cannot *be* utopia proper. Many scholars find ways to avoid this anachronism, for example by referring to utopian material in the Bible, such as the Garden of Eden, as proto-utopias that have had an influence on the modern genre of utopia. The notion of paradise, according to Manuel & Manuel, is a “prolegomenon and perennial accompaniment to utopia” and the “deepest archaeological layer of Western Utopia”.<sup>170</sup>

Kumar, too, sees modern literary utopias as to some degree indebted to images from the Bible. The transformations the images of the utopian genre undergo are noted, and he proposes to differentiate between the modern genre of utopia and its literary roots:

[The modern utopia] inherits classical and Christian forms and themes, but it transforms them into a distinctive novelty, a distinctive literary genre carrying a distinctive social philosophy.<sup>171</sup>

Kumar provides a statement on the anachronism of reading Bible as utopia. He says that “there is not, properly speaking, either a classical or a Christian utopia.”<sup>172</sup>

There is a distinct linearity in the image drawn from archaeology which the Manuels employ and in these statements by Kumar: biblical ideas of paradise, heaven, and similar notions have had an influence on modern utopia, which, however, is distinct from its forebears. In this linear approach only a unilateral influence appears to be possible. The Bible influences utopia, but utopia is barred from being comparable to the Bible, because of its “distinctive novelty” (Kumar) and its invention in the year 1516.

I want to challenge the notion of simple linearity of influence, but I also agree with Roland Boer, who, similar to Kumar, states that a genre such as utopia has “cultural precursors”.<sup>173</sup> Boer speaks of a risk when interpreting biblical books as utopia, the risk of “making eternal a genre whose features are tied to the specific socio-political context in which they have arisen.”<sup>174</sup> There is indeed a risk of doing just that. However, this flexible approach does not rely on

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<sup>170</sup> Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, 33.

<sup>171</sup> Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia*, 3.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Boer, *Novel Histories*, 122.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

strict genre definitions. It acknowledges that there are dissimilarities alongside the family resemblances.

The reader or interpreter of a text plays a crucial role in giving it meaning. The contemporary reader brings modern or even postmodern<sup>175</sup> ideas to any text, with little regard for where exactly each text is located on a linear chronological timeline.

An approach that seems to bridge the gap between the linear-chronological approach of unilateral influence and the Borgesian approach of mutual influence even of a 21<sup>st</sup> century text on the Bible, is expressed by John C. Mohawk. Although he agrees that utopian movements arise in specific contexts, he argues against regarding utopian thought and utopian movements as isolated occurrences tied to a specific context. He sees utopian movements as entering cultural memory – the “fabric of culture”<sup>176</sup> – even after their peak of popularity has passed: “In fact, elements of utopian ideology born in one age and context are known to persist and may be pursued by future generations in completely different contexts.”<sup>177</sup>

Although this is not a completely a-chronistic or non-linear approach, it is more open to claiming that mutual influences are possible, because the “fabric of culture”, which a reader will draw upon, contains both consciousness of 21<sup>st</sup> century popular culture and (more or less) knowledge of biblical texts. By entering the “fabric of culture”, the thought enters a public domain beyond linearity of theorists, historians, or literary critics. Utopian images may be re-appropriated in different times by different readers, and a utopian story (proto-utopian or utopian) may not remain safely in its supposed specific past context but can be transmitted into a different context. Utopian images in the Bible,

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<sup>175</sup> Scholars prefer using different terms, such as “late modernity”, “reflexive modernity”, “second modernity”, or “late capitalism” to describe the contemporary era. Terminology will be different depending on whose theories one chooses to work with. It should be acknowledged that theories and categories are not eternal and that there is a move away from dual categories: “The ‘secularization of secularity’ demonstrates the end of the ‘either-or’ conceptual framework of classical modernity and the emergence of the ‘both-and’ which Beck sees as the *leitmotif* of reflexive modernization.” Simon Speck, “Ulrich Beck’s ‘Reflecting Faith’: Individualization, Religion and the Desecularization of Reflexive Modernity,” *Sociology* 47, no. 1 (February 1, 2013): 162, doi:10.1177/0038038512448564.

<sup>176</sup> Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies*, 3.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

then, seem to be doubly likely to be transmitted and re-appropriated in very different contexts by a variety of readers.<sup>178</sup>

With an ideal type that relies on family resemblance rather than being preoccupied with linear influences, and drawing on Borges' "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" and "Kafka and His Precursors", the answer to whether there is utopia proper in the Bible is that there is utopia in the Bible, if we can see it there. Seeing the images there, does not make the "genre eternal",<sup>179</sup> it just puts them into a useful hypothetical dialogue with other utopian images.

## 2.6. *Gauging the concept of utopia for use with the Bible*

Do we have enough "final truths" about utopia to be able to use the concept to draw reliable conclusions about a socio-political setting that gave rise to the construction of biblical utopian images? The previous paragraphs will have foreshadowed a negative answer to this question. Chapter 3 "Utopia and Reality" offers the detailed theoretical discussion to substantiate it. The following paragraphs are dedicated to surveying existing opinions and dichotomies about utopias and to determining which of these opinions are applicable or useful when discussing the Bible as utopia.

Whether a utopian text can aid in the reconstruction of the socio-political climate at the time when it was originally composed or originally read, is a unique question to be asked of utopia. The political climates that gave rise to Renaissance or post-Renaissance utopias are often more accessible and better documented. Thus, the question of how to reconstruct the political climate behind a text tends not to be the main focus of the investigation when utopias are discussed. Most often we have to do with precisely dated works by an individual author and a well-documented redaction and publication history. This is not the case for biblical texts. In chapter 3 "Utopia and Reality" I will be

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<sup>178</sup> Puritan Pilgrim William Bradford's reference to the biblical episode of Num 13 is an appropriate example. In *Of Plymouth Plantation* Bradford crafts an episode to resemble the passage of Num 13. Captain Standish and some crewmen leave the *Mayflower* to explore the area – the "New English Canaan" (Thomas Morton) of New England – for the first time. They find and steal a Native Nation's food supplies. Bradford links this episode to Num 13, or more accurately, to a specific reading of Num 13, which interprets the behaviour of the "chosen people" whom Bradford identifies with, as righteous. Bradford's interpretation or re-appropriation of Num 13 is discussed in chapter 5.

<sup>179</sup> Boer, *Novel Histories*, 122.



concerned with the problems that come with the aim to reconstruct socio-political circumstances at the creation of a text.

The method by which one could try to arrive at some conclusions about the socio-political setting of the Bible and the circumstances of its production, would be to look at its utopian content and to survey existing theory about the production of utopias. This is problematic because the interdisciplinary field of utopian studies, to which new utopias and dystopias are added constantly, is in flux.

While many theorists seem to agree that utopias are often composed by members of non-dominant groups in times of social change, not everyone agrees. Most theory about utopia production is derived from specific modern examples of literary utopias. Modern theory on general parameters of utopia production derived from surveying, for example, American utopian texts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has to be applied to biblical utopian images carefully. In the following a summary is provided which aims to cover some views on the formation, transmission, and function of utopias. Common dichotomies are assessed, which are a) whether utopias are fictions or realistic proposals b) whether utopia and religion are separate concepts and c) whether a utopia describes a place or a “no-place”. These views are reviewed with specific reference to their potential to help or hinder a reading of the Bible as utopia.

### **2.6.1. Assumptions about formation and transmission of utopias must be applied to the Bible with caution**

There is a general consensus that texts which focus on better societies located in removed but recognisable environments tend to be written most frequently in times of fundamental change. Fredric Jameson,<sup>180</sup> among others, argues that the emergence of a specific genre of literature can be linked to significant epistemological paradigm shifts, which go hand in hand with changes in economy and social organisation. Suvin specifies concrete periods in which science fiction literature, which is closely related to utopian literature, was written more frequently than in other periods.<sup>181</sup> A tendency of utopian literature

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<sup>180</sup> Jameson, “Progress Versus Utopia Or, Can We Imagine The Future?”.

<sup>181</sup> “Conversely, SF, which focuses on the variable and future-bearing elements from the empirical environment, is found predominantly in the great whirlpool periods of history, such as

to appear in phases of fundamental change is also noted by Manuel & Manuel, who also name specific groups with possible utopian affinities: “[...] the Pythagoreans, the Essenes, the radical sectaries of the Middle Ages and the Reformation [...].”<sup>182</sup>

In addition to claiming that utopias are often produced in such revolutionary political climates, secondary literature implies that the collapse of revolutions can put an end to periods of increased production of utopias.<sup>183</sup> This supports the hypothesis that utopian literary pieces about improved societies appear more frequently in a revolutionary climate and that their production may cease in the absence of a revolutionary climate.

The observation that utopias flourish in periods of social change appears to be generally accepted. However, Lyman Tower Sargent disagrees, saying that there is a more or less constant production of utopias, not directly depending on specific revolutionary changes:

Also, “everyone knows” that utopias were written in greater numbers around depressions. Wildly exaggerated; utopias have been produced in a constant stream and while some relationship to depressions can be shown, it appears to be, at the minimum, a questionable relationship.<sup>184</sup>

I tend to agree with this cautious approach. In order to survey statistically how many utopias were written around certain times, one would have to choose which texts should be considered to be utopian at all. Furthermore, there might be an unknown number of undetected cases, utopias that may not be extant.

In addition to locating a utopia-writing climate in periods of intellectual, economic, scientific, or religious revolutions, some scholars mention the aspect

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the sixteenth-seventeenth and nineteenth-twentieth centuries.” Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (Yale University Press, 1979), 7.

<sup>182</sup> Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, 25.

<sup>183</sup> Suvin describes the development of “fantastic voyage” literature in England and France (by Swift, Defoe, Marivaux, and many others) and points out that the development of this genre was “cut short by the collapse of the democratic revolution in the nineteenth century.” Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 114. Marin mentions that “two circumstances gave birth to this book. [...] May 1968 and a colloquium organized two years later [...]” A revolutionary climate triggers thinking about the utopian propensity. And again, when the revolutionary climax is passed, the project becomes “just a book.” Louis Marin, *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces* (Humanities Press, 1990), 3–5.

<sup>184</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent, “Themes in Utopian Fiction in English before Wells,” *Science Fiction Studies* 10, no. 3.3 (1976), <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/10/sargent10art.htm>. Accessed October 29th, 2013.

of class in the production of utopian or science fiction literature. Suvin links the aspect of class to the aspect of revolution and change, saying that if (science fiction) literature expresses the yearnings of a formerly oppressed social group, then it is not surprising that such texts should surface during “periods of sudden social convulsion”.<sup>185</sup> Taking the analysis of the “utopian personality” further into psychological conjectures, Manuel & Manuel write that “an ideal visionary type, the perfect utopian, would probably both hate his father and come from a disinherited class.”<sup>186</sup>

Karl Mannheim, who like Ernst Bloch sees utopias as realistic proposals still at odds with reality,<sup>187</sup> claims that revolutionary climates nurtured utopian thought, because it was felt that utopian goals suddenly seemed realisable. He sees the “utopian mentality” as arising from the “oppressed strata of society”.<sup>188</sup> In his differentiation, ideology is what the dominant strata of society try to reinforce, whereas utopia is the movement for change, initiated by the non-dominant strata. Degrees of non-dominance of the authoring community can vary, though, ranging from oppression to feeling disrespected by a more dominant group.<sup>189</sup>

Looking at individual examples of utopian literature, it appears that individual authors of extant utopian pieces are not necessarily oppressed or disrespected. If one were to survey mainstream utopias until the present year 2013, the majority of their authors are certainly not oppressed. A longitudinal survey of utopias would, at some point in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, need to take into account the factor of commercial success and marketability. It is wrong to want to picture utopia as an idealistic intellectual phenomenon that is independent of popularity with a readership and commercial success.<sup>190</sup> If the assumption that

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<sup>185</sup> Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 11.

<sup>186</sup> Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, 27.

<sup>187</sup> “Only those orientations transcending reality will be referred to by us as utopian which, when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time.” Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 173.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>189</sup> “Sometimes the crisis that triggers the desire for change occurs when a group is not actually oppressed but feels disrespected by a culturally dominant group.” Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies*, 5–6.

<sup>190</sup> Novels, films, television series, or comic books referencing the utopian and dystopian traditions are commercially successful today. While one might conjecture, following observations about increased popularity in times of crises, that the current crisis supports their popularity, there is no denying that commercially successful utopia/dystopia franchises such as *The Matrix* or *The Hunger Games* depend to a crucial degree on their feasibility on the market,

utopias are produced among oppressed strata of society were tested on a sample of successful modern-day pieces of work, it would simply not hold true. Thus, the feature of being produced by non-dominant strata of society cannot be definitive in a diachronic ideal type of utopian literature.

The further removed in time a utopian piece was created, the more our awareness of it depends on whether it had enough impact to make the author a known historical figure and the work noteworthy enough to be continued to be reprinted or otherwise distributed. If utopias were not well-received at any point by those with the power to publish, archive, and transmit them, they would not be included in modern bibliographical surveys like the ones Lyman Tower Sargent has presented. For a working definition (or ideal type) of utopias over time, the waning of relevance, the former subversion, and also the modes of transmission are a challenge.

Manuel & Manuel write that “the *fortuna* of the original document is an inseparable part of its meaning [...]”<sup>191</sup> The original meaning of a utopian piece can only be properly understood if it is taken into account which situation it references and by which mechanisms it has survived. If a community wanted to transmit its utopian proposal, it had to ensure that it was written down or otherwise passed on.<sup>192</sup> The fact that a text survives must mean that it had constant appeal, either as a topical reference to an acute situation, or as an artefact of enough importance to be preserved as a museum piece or adopted into a canon. At the same time, it must not have been lost due to censorship or marginality.

These two assumptions many utopian critics mention (non-dominance of the author and increased production in times of revolutionary changes) are problematic themselves. The assumptions must include pre-definitions: what is meant by “non-dominance”, “revolution”, “production”, “utopia”, “author”, “reader”. Therefore, these assumptions can be applied to the Bible only very cautiously. At first sight, the assumptions would seem to match what is known about the social circumstances in which some biblical texts were most likely produced. The writers, redactors, and transmitters of certain texts in that

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and their authors, while they may be honestly concerned about the current state of society, are certainly not oppressed.

<sup>191</sup> Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, 25.

<sup>192</sup> Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies*, 57.

community would not have been culturally dominant (living under Persian rule, for example). A concrete experience of exile may have been a relatively recent addition to their cultural memory (Babylonian Exile), the return from which would constitute a revolutionary change.<sup>193</sup> Since within utopian studies discourse there is no final consensus either on oppressed authors or on increased production of utopias during revolutions, it would be rash to claim to have found another definite utopia in the Bible simply because it appears to match these propositions.

### **2.6.2. Utopias create and disrupt links between fiction and reality**

One stable definitive feature of a utopia is that it is a juxtaposition of a fiction with a reality. Suvin sees the thematic nucleus of the literary genre of utopia as the depiction of an “imaginary community in which human relations are organized more perfectly than in the author’s community.”<sup>194</sup> This perfection, he points out, does not have to be “absolute perfection” but rather means “a state radically better or based on a more perfect principle than that prevailing in the author’s community.”<sup>195</sup>

If we follow this definition by Suvin, it might mean that it is possible to reverse utopian images to say something about the creating community. The reality of the community is not always described in the utopia, probably because the empirical circumstances would have been known to the target audience of the utopia. In the case of biblical examples, it might be hard to make reliable statements about the circumstances behind the utopia, because different editorial layers must lead us to assume that there is not one empirical reality behind it upon which we can conclude but multiple realities and multiple opinions in slightly different cultures and times.

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<sup>193</sup> On social responses to societal upheaval and change, and reading their record in the Bible with sociological imagination see, for example, David Chalcraft, “Sociology and the Book of Chronicles: Risk, Ontological Security, Moral Panics, and Types of Narrative,” in *What Was Authoritative for Chronicles?*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Diana Edelman (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 201–228.

<sup>194</sup> Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 45.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* The further the argument of this thesis progresses, the more Suvin’s definition will have to be amended and modified. Chapter 6 on the relationship between utopia and dystopia, for example, will show that the fictional world juxtaposed with the real world does not necessarily have to “better”, only dramatically different, to create the effect Suvin calls “cognitive estrangement”.

We can say something about utopias and their appeal to a committed community of readers by looking at the Bible. In the Bible, the imaginary community, which is projected into a more or less distant past, is not entirely imaginary to a hypothetical “committed” reader of this text. The continuous narrative about “us” – a category perpetually reinforced by stories about encounters with “them” and reinforced by genealogical connections given everywhere, makes biblical utopian passages appealing and topical, especially to such readers who would consider themselves to be descendants of the biblical genealogy (by whichever theological or pseudo-scientific argument they were led to this conviction). To such a hypothetical community of “committed” readers, biblical texts do not speak about an imaginary community detached from the real one but about a more perfect situation of the same community.

I would conjecture that to a community of reader-believers, the effect of cognitive estrangement would not set in, or if it did, would need to be overcome. Suvin deems the effect cognitive estrangement of definitive importance to inspire a detached reflection upon empirical circumstances in the real world, after reading the fictional juxtaposition crafted in the utopia.<sup>196</sup> Biblical utopias seem to have an inherent capacity of being transformative rather than imaginative or reflective. To a large group of readers who would encounter biblical utopias such as the idea of heaven, the text is not about a community of strangers in a faraway location and culture, but about a literal community of “us”, transformed for the better, in a recognisable location.

Many utopias provide a link between the fiction and the culture of their origin.<sup>197</sup> However, the original pun of no-place/good-place and moments in

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<sup>196</sup> “The effect of such factual reporting of fictions is one of confronting a set normative system [...] with a point of view or glance implying a new set of norms; in literary theory, this is known as the attitude of estrangement.” The concept of estrangement, Suvin explains, was introduced by Victor Shklovsky (*ostranenie*) and developed further by Bertolt Brecht (*Verfremdungseffekt*). Darko Suvin, “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre,” *College English* 34, no. 3 (December 1, 1972): 374, doi:10.2307/375141.

<sup>197</sup> In Gilman’s *Herland*, in Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and in More’s *Utopia*, for example, it is made clear that at one point, the utopian people were in contact with “our” society. Gilman does this by saying that the people of “Herland” are “white” – she means that they are descendants of Europeans. Bellamy reveals that the visitor of the future utopia and the utopian family are related. More mentions that the Utopians were in touch with Roman and Greek culture and have adapted their culture to reflect the best aspects of Roman and Greek culture. Utopias establish different links to past, present, and future. More’s *Utopia* exists at the same time as More’s England. Other utopias are set in the future: *Looking Backward*, and also, for example Gene Roddenberry’s *Star Trek*, depicting a mostly peaceful community which values learning and non-invasive exploration, and treats technological progress ethically. *Star Trek*

which the reader's disbelief has to be suspended (for example, when a protagonist falls asleep for more than one hundred years) generate a barrier that prevents a critical reader from taking the utopia literally. These barriers formed by the pun or suspension of disbelief promote the reading of a utopia as an abstract idea or a symbol. This sets utopia apart from political proposals, which are concerned with recognisable locations such as a specific nation at a specific time in the near future. I show in chapter 4 about the fictional map of Numbers 13, how the boundary that would prove that the stories about the Promised Land found in the Bible contain the no-place/good-place barrier, is broken down to transform the Bible from a contemplative cognitively estranged text into a transformative one, for which eternal relevance is fabricated.

### **2.6.3. Dating of a utopia impacts its function as a call to action**

What is the function of utopia and what could the function of utopia be in the Bible? A utopia might be a call to action or it could be a way to criticise certain issues in the author's present or – especially in the manifestation of the dystopia – a utopia can be a warning extrapolated from present circumstances. Whether a text has realistic potential or is seen as a historic literary document depends on the interpreter (or community of interpreters) and the meaning it is being given.

A utopia may have been a call to action when it was first written, but it might not be understood as a call to action today, but rather be seen as a document that is valued because it gives us insights into the aspirations of a past community.<sup>198</sup> If a utopian text could be seen as a call to action to some degree, its potential to inspire action might be limited to a specific era and will vary according to who interprets it, when it is interpreted, and with which motives.<sup>199</sup>

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bridges the gap between contemporary culture and the fictional future culture by referring to well-known figures in contemporary culture, and adding fictional names to complete a semi-fictional linear chronology that ends in the fictional future.

<sup>198</sup> There is, for instance, a letter by William Penn describing Pennsylvania in quasi-utopian terms with the clear objective to inspire people to migrate there. The image drawn of Pennsylvania is not necessarily one that would inspire anyone nowadays to settle there. William Penn, in *Umständige Geographische Beschreibung Der Zu Allerletzt Erfundenen Provinz Pensylvaniae in Denen End-Gräntzen Americae in Der West-Weltgelegen*, ed. Francis Daniel Pastorius (Frankfurt: Andreas Otto, 1700), 123–135.

<sup>199</sup> Michael Walzer, for example, shows how the biblical Exodus narrative has had an impact on many revolutionary liberation movements throughout history. Other texts may not be as versatile with regard to their realistic applicability. Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*.

Davies writes that “[...] dating does not largely affect the function of the imagery or indeed the purpose of the book.”<sup>200</sup> I disagree strongly if the book is discussed with regard to possible utopian content. Dating has an enormous influence on the utopian or dystopian propensity of the text. Dating may influence whether a text should be seen as a topical response to socio-political circumstances or as an artefact that was valued because it was already an older cultural artefact when it was canonised. This has significant implications for the question whether or not historical reality can be extracted from the utopian text. If we know – or assume after gathering some clues – that the text responds directly to a contemporary socio-political situation, we will make different statements about its mirror-value than we would if we assumed that the text was read and valued by historical communities as a historical text for liturgical or sentimental reasons, or reasons of preserving memory or history. If an edition of the letter by William Penn advertising Pennsylvania in utopian terms, were dated 1982 and it was then assumed by a hypothetical naïve interpreter from the far future that the letter described the historical circumstances of 1982, this interpreter would be wrong. If the interpreter assumed that in 1982 the letter was read as a historical document, which was the reason to include it in an edition, the interpreter from the future would be correct.

Finally, there is a possibility that biblical utopian images may function as pure narrative tools. The utopian image of the Promised Land found in the book of Numbers (specifically Numbers 13), for example, sets the story up for yet another incident of rebellion. The Israelite protagonists have escaped from exile in Egypt and on their desert trek towards the land of Canaan – their alleged Promised Land – there are multiple incidents of rebellion against God due to dissatisfaction with their situation. When some members of the community reject the utopian image of the Promised Land and emphasise a dystopian image of the possible eradication by strong rival tribes, the punishment brought over the community is another 40 years of wandering in the desert.

The utopian and dystopian images clearly show approved and not approved behaviours and serve to create an “us-versus-them” dichotomy. The juxtaposition of an image of a potentially improved state of being in the

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<sup>200</sup> Davies, “The Wilderness Years: Utopia and Dystopia in the Book of Hosea,” 162.



Promised Land with a dystopian image of the eradication of the protagonist community convey a message that is not so much a call to action to change a particular historical society, but rather a more universal statement about obedience to divine command, and separation of the “us” and “them” groups.

#### **2.6.4. Features of literary utopias: fiction, history, place**

Scholars have proposed different features as being constitutive of utopia. Lyman Tower Sargent’s “Three Faces of Utopianism”<sup>201</sup> are utopian literature, utopian thought, and utopian communities. These could be seen as overarching categories imposed on the phenomenon. But since the idea and the word originated with a piece of literature, Thomas More’s *Utopia*, most attention here is paid to utopian literature and utopian thought.

One scholar may come to the conclusion that utopias are realistic proposals aimed at convincing a community to take action; others may claim they are heuristic fictions. Below I will discuss three examples of different extreme opinions on what constitutes utopia: Literary fiction as opposed to realistic proposal, religion as opposed to history, and place as opposed to no-place. I will argue that a text can be considered to be utopian even if it exhibits an element that is not thought of as utopian by scholars. In other words, a realistic proposal that deals with an empirical geography can be considered utopian, as well as a fiction that deals with a transcendental place.

##### **2.6.4.1. Literary fiction, realistic proposal, historiography**

Whether they are fictions or considered to be realistic, utopias most often come down to us in written form:

I propose that an acknowledgment that utopias are verbal artifacts before they are anything else, and that the source of this concept is a literary genre and its parameters, might be, if not the first and the last, nonetheless a *central* point in today’s debate on utopias.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited.”

<sup>202</sup> Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 39.

Manuel & Manuel define the appearance of utopia in a similar way: “As a mental event, a utopia takes the form of a written document and is usually composed by one man [*sic*].”<sup>203</sup>

Both “literature” and “thought” are written. The latter quote, specifically, addresses the relationship between thought and its manifestation. It also insists on a certain individualism (“composed by one man”), which makes it relevant to ask from which individual manifestations or artefacts we draw utopian samples and how a collection of individual manifestations is categorised into what could be called “utopian thought”. Mannheim is concerned with this process and while denying the existence of a collective consciousness, he claims that although only individuals are capable of generating a thought, some mental events can become part of a group mentality.<sup>204</sup> Mannheim is biased towards the ideal type procedure and does not argue in favour of solipsistic individualism, in which individual manifestations cannot be connected to form a larger concept. But he, too, proposes that “thought” is first produced by individuals, although it cannot be assessed by looking at only one individual.<sup>205</sup>

If the “mental event” resonates with more than one individual it may be taken up by contemporaries or later generations of thinkers, who will also leave manifestations of the “mental event”, taking up threads spun by others before them. “Utopian thought” does link back to individuals and their creations, but through these individual moments has become more than the sum of its parts. Especially when investigating past instances of utopia, texts that exhibit utopian features are the best and most solid starting point. We can agree with Suvin and the Manuels that the samples we can draw upon to start seeing a larger picture of utopia are literary creations.

One might object that activists have been eager to realise utopias and that often utopia or utopian thought is understood not so much as a literary artefact,

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<sup>203</sup> Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, 26.

<sup>204</sup> “It is indeed true that only the individual is capable of thinking. There is no such metaphysical entity as a group mind which thinks over and above the heads of individuals, or whose ideas the individual merely reproduces. Nevertheless it would be false to deduce from this that all the ideas and sentiments which motivate an individual have their origin in him alone, and can be adequately explained solely on the basis of his own life-experience.” Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 2.

<sup>205</sup> “Just as it would be incorrect to attempt to derive a language merely from observing a single individual, who speaks not a language of his own but rather that of his contemporaries and predecessors who have prepared the path for him, so it is incorrect to explain the totality of an outlook only with reference to its genesis in the mind of the individual.” Ibid.

but as a political programme, a call to action to pro-actively change society. This is also the stance taken by many works on utopia which investigate utopia as a term used by proponents or opponents of political movements, not as a literary genre. Arguments about whether utopias can potentially bring about social change are the focus of many theoretical works on utopia,<sup>206</sup> whether these advocate the real-life application of utopian constructions or reject them. However, a utopian community (or an attempt to establish one) or a utopian state (socialist regimes come to mind) can be incorporated into utopian features of “written” and “literary”. Additional aspects of utopia are “impossibility”, “irreality”, and “ideal pictures”.<sup>207</sup> It is a definitive aspect of an ideal type of utopia that the proposed utopian social system remains un-realised, forever projected into a future that does not arrive, projected into an idealised formative past,<sup>208</sup> or doomed to fail in the present. To put it with Jameson: “[...] an ‘achieved’ Utopia – a full representation – is a contradiction in terms.”<sup>209</sup> What may remain of any attempt are artefacts, often literary.

Suvin mentions the debate on whether utopia has ever been realised, “especially in the various socialist attempts at a radically different social system”, and mentions that “shell-shocked refugees”<sup>210</sup> from such an attempted system often oppose the idea that utopias are realisable. People who have held positions of power within a so-called utopian system, advocate their own system and its potential to be realised – not surprisingly. It becomes clear that whether or not a utopia is thought of as a fiction or a realistic proposal depends on who reads the text, in addition to depending on what the author intends.

In the Bible we may well encounter different attitudes towards the realistic potential of a utopia or a utopia’s potential to inspire a reader to take action. Ben Zvi says that biblical utopian thought was not intended to “present a plan of action for [... the community]. Utopia was not about to be turned into reality by

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<sup>206</sup> See for instance Levitas’ discussion of Marx, Engels, and utopian socialism (Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 35–58.) or Georges Sorel and Karl Mannheim (Ibid., 59–83.). Or Ruth Levitas and Lucy Sargisson, “Utopia in Dark Times: Optimism/Pessimism and Utopia/Dystopia,” in *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini (London: Routledge, 2003), 13–28.

<sup>207</sup> Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 41.

<sup>208</sup> Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 21.

<sup>209</sup> Jameson, “Progress Versus Utopia Or, Can We Imagine The Future?”: 157.

<sup>210</sup> Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 38.

their actions.”<sup>211</sup> Ben Zvi speaks of the intended original readership of a biblical utopia. In another context he says that utopian prophetic texts “must construe utopia as something certain to be attained”,<sup>212</sup> because prophecies were thought to be divinely designed plans for the community. An analysis of a different sample of utopia or of utopian images even within the same corpus may come up with equally reasonable conclusions on whether or not a particular utopian description was intended to be realised. Some utopian texts can be understood to be a call to action, some are not necessarily, and for some no decision can be made.<sup>213</sup> To an important extent, the decision depends on the reader, not even on the author.

Bellamy’s utopia *Looking Backward* sparked an enormous response in the social reform movement when it was first published in 1887, but it was not originally intended to be a proposal for social reform: “In undertaking to write *Looking Backward* I had, at the outset, no idea of attempting a serious contribution to the movement of social reform.”<sup>214</sup> The original idea was to write a “fairy tale of social felicity”,<sup>215</sup> a fantasy-fiction. On the other hand, Skinner writes about his intentions in writing *Walden Two*: “Some readers may take the book as written with tongue in cheek, but it was actually a quite serious proposal.”<sup>216</sup>

Kenneth M. Roemer includes the crucial variable of the reader in his definition of utopia. This variable is often lacking or only implicit in other scholars’ treatment of utopia. It depends on the reader whether a text is seen as fiction or realistic proposal and into which of Sargent’s three categories of literature, thought (or, to a lesser degree, community) one might choose to put a sample. Roemer’s working definition of utopia is,

<sup>211</sup> Ben Zvi, “Utopias, Multiple Utopias, and Why Utopias at All?,” 77.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>213</sup> “The issue of possibility also relates directly to the content of a utopia, and again, judgments differ. Some wish to reverse the colloquial meaning and assert that utopias – or at least important utopias – are not impossible at all, but derive their significance from the fact that they are realistic. Such an assertion involves recognising that our notions of what is realistic are socially structured, and thus our judgments must be tempered with caution. [...] Some utopias may be possible worlds, others not; and while it may be fruitful to reflect on these issues, they are not definitive ones.” Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 4–5. Similarly, Segal: “It is crucial to keep in mind that not all utopias are intended to be established in the first place.” Segal, *Utopias*, 13.

<sup>214</sup> Edward Bellamy, “How and Why I Wrote *Looking Backward*,” in *America as Utopia*, ed. Kenneth M. Roemer (New York: Burt Franklin & Co, 1981), 22.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> B.F. Skinner, “Utopia as an Experimental Culture,” in *America as Utopia*, ed. Kenneth M. Roemer (New York: Burt Franklin & Co, 1981), 29.

a fairly detailed narrative description of an imaginary culture – a fiction that invites readers to experience vicariously an alternative reality that critiques theirs by opening cognitive and affective spaces that encourage readers to perceive the realities and potentialities of their culture in new ways.<sup>217</sup>

This definition acknowledges the crucial variable of the reader, though it does not yet tackle the problem of the reader who approaches the utopia from a different time or culture.

Above, I referred to Ben Zvi's work on utopia in the prophetic books. Much of my thesis is concerned with a passage that I consider to be a utopia of the past from the point of view of its authors, and a potential call-to-action utopia from the point of view of its diachronic audiences. It is set in the past from both points of view, so it is akin to a variant of utopia sometimes referred to as Golden Age utopia.

Thompson has written about the implications of recognising a text as historiography, which is "a specific literary genre relating to critical descriptions and evaluations of past reality and events, in contrast to more fictional varieties of prose."<sup>218</sup> In biblical literature, it is often impossible to distinguish with certainty between historical and fictional literature.<sup>219</sup> The link between a utopian fiction and reality will be explored further in chapter 3, here I want to draw attention to the impact a reader of a text has on determining its fictional or realistic potential.

Biblical utopias are not seen as imaginary by all their readers. Thompson's assessment of the Pentateuch as a utopia of the past which was shaped to be of particular relevance to the present of its redactors in the Persian period is convincing, but of course not accepted by every reader who encounters the Bible. A biblical utopia has to be made a utopia by the reader, it is not automatically a utopia. It may appear to a reader as representation of historical fact. In order for the biblical utopia to criticise a contemporary Bible reader's reality and to offer an alternative reality, the reader will have to put their experienced world into a direct relationship with the biblical world.

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<sup>217</sup> Roemer, *Utopian Audiences*, 20.

<sup>218</sup> Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People*, 373.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

#### 2.6.4.2. Religious beliefs can be utopian

To what degree is the utopian imagination of a radically improved society related to transcendental ideas of heaven, the World to Come, a New Jerusalem, or the Kingdom of God? The sample discussed in this thesis is not concerned with transcendental environments such as heaven or the World to Come, but a seemingly empirical environment, which a group of literary characters who perceive of themselves as “chosen” seek to possess.

According to Suvin, utopias are not visions concerned with the next world, life after death, or a heavenly (as opposed to earthly) paradise. Suvin says, following Ruyer, that religion is “counterutopian”:

[Religion] is directed either towards Heaven (transcendence) or towards Middlesex (bounded empirical environment). In either case it is incompatible with a non-transcendental overstepping of empirical boundaries. The *telos* of religion is, finally, eternity or timelessness, not history.<sup>220</sup>

This statement lacks a definition of what is meant by “religion”. It is neither clear whether religious practice, literature, or personal belief is meant by saying “religion”, nor whether “religion” is simplistically understood as Christian beliefs.<sup>221</sup> Levitas writes, “The relatively messy and difficult nature of non-textual utopias may explain why few commentators cross our second boundary, between utopia and religion.”<sup>222</sup> Religion, in this citation, is considered a form of non-textual utopia. I am concerned with utopian manifestations in a specific corpus of texts, the Hebrew Bible. It would be anachronistic to call the raw material of the Hebrew Bible “Jewish” or “Christian”, because these are terms historians, believers, or scholars affix to the corpus. When we approach Numbers 13 through the readings of William Bradford and Cotton Mather in chapter 5, we may reconsider calling it a “religious” or even a “Christian” text,

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<sup>220</sup> Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 43. This statement contains a reference to Thomas B. Macaulay’s famous saying, “An acre in Middlesex is better than a principality in utopia.”

<sup>221</sup> It has been criticised in the Literature Review that biblical scholars seem to assume that there is an agreed upon definition of utopia, so often they do not mention whose definition they are applying. Similarly it appears as though utopian scholars treat the term “religion” rather carelessly and we are left guessing if they refer to a particular belief, a denomination, a corpus of texts, or liturgical practice.

<sup>222</sup> Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 32–33.

but it must be made that by a reader: “For a text to be ‘sacred’ or ‘scriptural’ it must be endowed and continue to be endowed with the appropriate significance by a defined group of interlocutors [...].”<sup>223</sup>

Revisiting Suvin’s statement with this in mind, we can see that the dichotomy he appears to propose is not applicable to the project of reading the Bible as utopia. The Bible is not inherently a “religious” text. History writing, though, is an essential element of the Bible; we might even say with Suvin, that it is its *telos*. The “history” of the creation of the earth, genealogies starting with the patriarchs, and the fate of the people of Israel may become an element within an individual’s or group’s religious worldview.

With Mohawk, we can approach the issue using different terminology, which may help us to develop a better idea of the interrelatedness of utopia, religion, and faith. Mohawk uses the term “faith”, not “religion”, and speaks about utopian movements reading their texts (which may be the Bible or the *Communist Manifesto*) as realistic proposals:

When the supernatural is expected to deliver the utopia, this trust or confidence is defined as faith, but that term is not inappropriate when applied to secular utopianism. The Christian’s belief in the utopian Kingdom of God on earth is an article of faith, but so is the Marxist’s belief in the inevitable triumph of socialism.<sup>224</sup>

The first part of this statement is still reminiscent of Kumar, who says (in addition to agreeing with Suvin that the imagined space in which the utopia is thought to be fulfilled is not transcendental but this-worldly), that a utopia imagines a change brought on by human beings, not by God.<sup>225</sup> Mohawk’s differentiation is more accommodating and better defined than Suvin’s endorsement of a strict separation between utopia and religion, seeing religion as effectively counter-utopian, because it is supposedly concerned with a transcendental realm. Mohawk, as opposed to Suvin, does not seem to propose hermetically sealed off categories.<sup>226</sup>

It is possible that both Suvin and Kumar see ancient literature, for example biblical literature, as more static and homogenous than it is seen by biblical

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<sup>223</sup> Bielo, *Words Upon the Word: An Ethnography of Evangelical Group Bible Study*, 13.

<sup>224</sup> Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies*, 4.

<sup>225</sup> Segal, *Utopias*, 10.

<sup>226</sup> Segal agrees: *Ibid*.

scholars. Van Seters, speaking about history writing in early antiquity, says that it is quite usual for some texts to “express a sense of continuity and causality that is quite secular in outlook, while other historical texts of the same culture and period reflect a strong religious outlook.”<sup>227</sup> Not all texts that were adopted into a “religious” canon (by humans, obviously), such as the Bible, can be considered according to strictly defined categories of “secular” and “religious” or “empirical world” and “transcendental realm”. These categories are most certainly not inherent to the texts themselves.

In addition to the lack of unified outlook on cause and effect in historical development, there is the variable of the reader to consider. Suvin’s differentiation “utopia versus religion” does not appear to take this variable into account. A critical reader may read a text as a fiction which uses transcendental images not because a past community believed in Heavenly Jerusalem, but because the socio-political circumstances, which the past community encountered, elicited a response which became manifest in the figure of a transcendental image. A different reader may read the same text as referring to a realistically attainable environment, and believe that the text includes literal instructions on how to attain this environment, heaven or paradise. The realistic potential that biblical utopias hold is obvious and precarious in modern-day reality. Mohawk’s work and that of other postcolonial critics engaging with related issues, shows this.<sup>228</sup>

At this point, let us acknowledge that there is a dichotomy in scholarly discourse about the relationship between religion and utopia, where “religion” is often not defined very well. Reading Bible as utopia may not, in the first instance, have to deal with this dichotomy before one begins to take into account readings of the Bible by readers who see it as containing instructions on how to attain a transcendental utopia such as heaven. The dichotomy is turned into somewhat more of a sliding scale in Mohawk’s statement, which is deemed

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<sup>227</sup> Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 5.

<sup>228</sup> Other works that deal with the aftermath of taking the utopia of the Promised Land and its utopian boundaries literally, are Nur Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Palestine-Israel* (London: Zed Books, 2007); Warrior, “A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians”; Said, “Michael Walzer’s ‘Exodus and Revolution’: A Canaanite Reading”; Whitlam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel*. Mark G. Brett, *Decolonizing God: The Bible in the Tides of Empire* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008).



the most useful for this thesis and its endeavour to work with, but outside of, dichotomies. Both the Bible and the *Communist Manifesto* can contain articles of faith for particular readers, if they are read as more than heuristic devices.

The reader or interpreter, once again, may actually be the one to decide on the issue of whether religion is not utopian because a utopia is thought of as being located not in a transcendental realm, but in this world. Many interpreters of the Bible, some who hold a religious belief in its divine origin or others who are concerned with proving that events described in the Bible faithfully depict historical reality, do not see the texts as referring to a transcendental dimension or a fictionalised past, but as referring to an empirical past. Even the transcendental or mythological environment of the Garden of Eden was seen, for example by cartographers<sup>229</sup> or travellers such as Columbus,<sup>230</sup> as being located not out of this world, but within it, as an empirically verifiable geography.

#### **2.6.4.3. Place and no-place are combined in the utopian pun**

It has been argued that by taking “*ou-topia*” (no-place) literally, it automatically refers to a place outside of this world. As Ben Zvi puts it, “utopias describe, as they must, a world ‘nowhere’ seen by relevant communities of readers and composers.”<sup>231</sup> Of course something that is not seen could be either this-worldly or otherworldly, removed in time or in space. Either way, the “unseen”

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<sup>229</sup> See for example *Sacred geography: Contained in six maps, viz. I. Shewing the situation of paradise, and the country inhabited by the patriarchs. II. The peopling the world by the sons of Noah, and the Israelites journeying in the wilderness. III. A plan of the city of Jerusalem, with view of Solomon's Temple, and all the sacred utensils therein. IV. The Holy Land, divided into the twelve tribes of Israel, in which are exactly traced our Saviours travels. V. The land of Canaan. VI. The travels of St. Paul, and the rest of the apostles. The whole very useful for the better understanding of the Holy Bible.* (London: Printed for Richard Ware, at the Bible and Sun in Amen-Corner, MDCCXXV 1725, 1725). Accessible online via <http://www.shef.ac.uk/library/intro>.

<sup>230</sup> Columbus wrote about assuming to be in the vicinity of earthly paradise in a letter to the queen and king of Spain from the third voyage: “There are great indications of this being the terrestrial paradise, for its site coincides with the opinion of the holy and wise theologians whom I have mentioned; and moreover, the other evidences agree with the supposition, for I have never either read or heard of fresh water coming in so large a quantity, in close conjunction with the water of the sea; the idea is also corroborated by the blandness of the temperature; and if the water of which I speak, does not proceed from the earthly paradise, it seems to be a still greater wonder, for I do not believe that there is any river in the world so large or so deep.” Cited in Christopher Columbus, *Select Letters of Christopher Columbus, with Other Original Documents, Relating to His Four Voyages to the New World*, ed. R.H. Major, 2nd Edition (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1870), 142–143.

<sup>231</sup> Ben Zvi, “Utopias, Multiple Utopias, and Why Utopias at All?,” 64.

maintains a link to this world, since it is in this world that a reader (or reading community) or an author perceives the lack of “not seeing” the utopian world.

Literary utopias, biblical and non-biblical, are usually too short<sup>232</sup> to deliver a full and nuanced description of a more perfect world (as Suvin agrees<sup>233</sup>). These short descriptions reflect some aspects thought of as “better” than the author’s perceived reality, and therefore do not stand disconnected from reality.

Whether the authors of a text choose to project their descriptions of a better state onto a geographically known place or onto an otherworldly place, we can still infer from the brief descriptions we find in the utopian text, that a particular feature is perceived as a lack in the author’s contemporary socio-political environment. The role which the authoring or propagating community of a utopia plays in its own utopian text is more important than whether the imagined ideal state is projected onto an empirical environment or heaven.<sup>234</sup> Utopias describing a “Promised Land” – this-worldly and non-transcendental it would seem – are made more transcendental by saying that only with God’s help and only through strict obedience of divine law can this this-worldly place be attained by a chosen people, which is one of the main themes in the Pentateuch.<sup>235</sup>

Suvin’s dichotomy of religion striving either for heaven or a bounded empirical environment<sup>236</sup> does not actually involve two opposed concepts. Heaven and a utopian empirical environment are not transcendental to the same degree, but they are both connected to the world by being “beyond” the world. The transcendental is only possible if there is a relationship to the non-

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<sup>232</sup> “Moreover, given that the depictions of utopian circumstances tend to appear in short, poignant passages, they do not and cannot deal with all aspects of the new ideal world, these texts suggest a prioritization of perceived lacks and high desires [...]” Ibid., 60.

<sup>233</sup> “As Frye has pointed out, utopia belongs to a narrative form and tradition which he calls anatomy (or Menippean satire) rather than to the novel. The anatomy deals less with illusionistic ‘people as such than with mental attitudes’ and at its most concentrated ‘presents us with a vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern.’” Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 49.

<sup>234</sup> Mohawk is concerned with European utopian visions that were used as means to justify oppression, conquest, or enslavement. Since his concern is mostly real-life effects of utopian imagination, not a description of the genre of utopian writing itself, his main interest is how the utopia producing community sees its own role in propagating or realising the utopian vision: “Sometimes these visions suggested that the state of perfection would be realized on earth, sometimes in heaven, but always Europeans imagined themselves as its agents.” Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies*, 233.

<sup>235</sup> John J. Collins has discussed the fact that the arrival of a utopian state in the Bible depends upon obedience to YHWH in Collins, “Models of Utopia.”

<sup>236</sup> Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 43.

transcendental. “Mapping” may be an element that connects the transcendental and the geographical utopia. Even transcendental utopian places are often described in some detail, for example the heavenly Jerusalem, or the Garden of Eden.

Chapter 4 “A Utopian Reading of Numbers 13” will demonstrate how supposedly realistic mapping works in utopia to conjure up an illusion, but in fact either consciously plays with the pun *ou-topia* or unconsciously and maybe unintentionally delivers maps that are not representations that can be located on a real map. The oscillation between place and no-place is crucial and expected in utopia; it is the pun that gives the genre its name. “[A] key function of a utopian text is its ability to encourage readers to visualize the non-existent.”<sup>237</sup> Making a definitive decision on whether *ou-topia* is located here or there, in this world or that world, off or on a map, would mean to deprive the phenomenon of its most definitive feature, which is the pun.

## 2.7. *Summary and outlook*

Those who write anti-utopias or dystopias often exaggerate the apparent stasis of utopian societies. The description of a utopian society will always seem as static as in *Utopia*, because it cannot describe all issues. It relies on creating a model society based on paradigmatic cases. Utopian theory often seems to do what its subject matter does in this sense: attempting to create a full representation of the reality of the many extant utopian texts by drawing up an unrealistically clean set of taxonomies, bibliographies, and features that are often separated neatly into “not utopian” and “utopian” or other dichotomies.

Dystopias or anti-utopias imply that a truly utopian society would need to accommodate differences, encourage innovation, and embrace the irreconcilable. The idea of an ideal type of utopia used instead of a definition in this thesis is indebted to this idea. Previous work which uses strict exclusive definitions is drawn upon, but mainly to show that ultimately the approval of one definition (and the rejection of another) for a particular example of a utopian text lies with the reader.

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<sup>237</sup> Roemer, *Utopian Audiences*, 60.

By pointing to family resemblances rather than “eternal” categories or genres, and by admitting that these resemblances may only be seen by certain readers (contemporary reader, not committed to the idea of the biblical text as the “word of God”; a reader who has also read *Utopia* and watched *Star Trek*), the anachronism of reading utopia in the Bible is overcome, because all texts come together in the reader, independently of the date of their original production. While coming to some new conclusions and insights about structure, narrative function, motifs, and ideology of a biblical text (Numbers 13), final conclusions will be more concerned with readers than with exegesis and more with the Bible as a contemporary text than with it as a historical text.

It is an interesting observation that motifs that are considered to be utopian in early utopias, turn dystopian in texts that originate from a society in which the technological or political means are available to bring about the utopian change that used to be unrealistic or impossible. Hans Jonas, for example, warns of applying a Baconian enthusiasm about domination over nature in a world in which technological means to subsume nature are available because this will result in unsustainable exploitation of natural resources.<sup>238</sup> Moreover, marginal utopian ideas can be turned into real-life dystopian situations if they are forced into reality:

Although there have been many utopian-inspired movements, relatively few, such as Christianity, Islam, and Marxism, have changed the course of Western history. In these instances, the beliefs of a small or isolated group became the driving ideas that inspired people who had political or military power at their disposal. Often they commanded an army, coercive police force, or other civil authority that could be used with a heavy hand.<sup>239</sup>

The important insight that the Bible can be a dangerous text<sup>240</sup> appears clearly when reading it as utopia. Its utopian danger exists because of its unique

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<sup>238</sup> Hans Jonas, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung: Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation* (Suhrkamp Verlag KG, 2003).

<sup>239</sup> Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies*, 2.

<sup>240</sup> The Bible by its nature as a constantly changed and changing text, which some regard to be sacred, is available for ideological manipulation as Carroll shows: “Collections of books, such as the Bible, have many meanings and uses, and over a long period of history those meanings and uses can change quite radically. Such books, when treated as sacred scripture, can be very dangerous indeed. They are very vulnerable to manipulation, and because of the great diversity of what they contain they can be made to serve the powerful as weapons against the weak.

potential to inspire action. To a degree, the utopian danger has existed within it even before it was “freed [...] from religious control”.<sup>241</sup>

The Bible contains passages that deal with hopeful fantasies that are not set in safely removed transcendental spaces, so that the spaces described can be mistaken for eternal empirical geographical places, and it contains passages that deal with the outsiders of the utopian community, which can be read as instructions for how to achieve utopia by eradicating the outsider. It is possible that such dangerous passages encounter the social means, the political fervour, and the belief in their literality in different time periods until and including today, to bring them about in reality.

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Whatever the Bible may say about oppression it has in its time served the interests of the oppressor.” Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold*, 5.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 72.

### 3. Utopia and Reality

#### *Chapter summary*<sup>242</sup>

A specific question one may ask of biblical utopias is whether they allow insights into the socio-political situation of the community that created the utopia (possibly from older texts and themes). This chapter discusses whether utopian readings are a useful way to reconstruct historical realities at the time of the Bible's composition or redaction.

First, I discuss theoretical perspectives about the relationship of utopias to the socio-political environment at the time of their creation. I identify three groups of sign users involved in creating a text and giving it meaning: authors, readers contemporary to the time of writing (intended audience), and any reader throughout history if the text is extant. I summarise perspectives by Suvin and Williams who are pessimistic that a utopia can be fully understood by readers who are not members of the intended audience.

Finally, I will use Holquist's article "How to Play Utopia" to attempt to draw from it a methodological strategy for reconstructing realities from ancient utopias. The discussion of Holquist's article concludes that in utopia-production there are too many variables to reliably reconstruct historical reality from a supposedly utopian text. This chapter concludes that deep knowledge of more than just a text passage would be needed to make an approximation of the historical circumstances at the creation of a utopian text, and that a utopian reading alone is not a more reliable method than others to make statements about historical circumstances.

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<sup>242</sup> Parts of this chapter will be published as Frauke Uhlenbruch, "Reconstructing Realities from Biblical Utopias: Alien Readers and Dystopian Potentials," *Biblical Interpretation* tbc, no. tbc (forthcoming): tbc.

### 3.1. *Biblical utopias may allow insights into the “Zero World”*

Before approaching the question whether utopian theory can be a helpful way to reconstruct historical reality at the production of a text, it is necessary to explore how utopia relates to the reality its author experienced, and also how (and if) it relates to the reality of a reader from a different time period.

Darko Suvin writes,

In a typology of literary genres for our cognitive age, one basic parameter would take into account the relationship of the world(s) each genre presents and the “zero world” of empirically verifiable properties around the author [...].<sup>243</sup>

While Suvin’s theory on utopia (and science fiction)<sup>244</sup> is concerned with the relationship of the Zero World (to use Suvin’s term) to the fiction extrapolated from it, there appears to be no literature which addresses the problem of reconstructing reality from the utopia. If the extrapolated world – the “world each genre presents” – were the most conclusive evidence we have of a Zero World behind it, is it possible to reconstruct the Zero World from the “literary republic”? This might be one of the most crucial questions a biblical scholar may ask of a utopian text in the Bible.

The biblical “literary republic” is difficult to separate from specific knowledges, debates, and assumptions attached to it. These will be different depending on the person who interprets the biblical text, their agenda, and the era in which they interpret the text. The experiment here is conducted on an ideal type that supposes hypothetically that a text can be regarded independently of presuppositions. For now, the text will be seen as an impossibly clean teaching skeleton at a biology lab that is artificially manufactured to show the idea(l), without any fracture lines or unusual formations. In order to think about whether reality can be derived from the utopia, historiographical, historical, linguistic, and archaeological considerations are left out for now.

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<sup>243</sup> Suvin, “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre,” 377.

<sup>244</sup> Horror and fantasy theorists also frequently discuss the relationship between reality and textual world. For a more detailed survey of theorists such as Todorov and Jackson, see my excursus on fantasy and horror at the end of chapter 6.

I am going to survey different theorists' perspectives on the relationship between a utopian fiction and the Zero World of the author.<sup>245</sup> I add a discussion on the hermeneutic variable of the empirical environment of the reader. Although the issue of the relationship between utopia and the author's reality is addressed by many theorists dealing with utopia, it often remains implicit in their theory that the reader<sup>246</sup> is a crucial variable in the utopian game. An imagined readership is not a static entity; there will be differences depending on which synchronic view of the reader we take, just like images used in utopias change according to the era or the social class in which they were produced.

Ehud Ben Zvi's work on utopia in the prophetic books of the Bible is one example of a scholar applying the concept of utopia to investigate a specific Zero World – the literati community of late Persian period Jerusalem.

One may open a most significant window into the world of the community whose future is addressed, as well as their understanding of themselves when one examines [...] the way in which people approach the issue of describing the future.<sup>247</sup>

From the perspective of an ancient historian using the concept of utopia, some questions can be answered about the social function of utopian material in the Hebrew Bible. The approach is a synchronic one, asking questions about a specific historical community and using prior knowledge about the worldview of this community in addition to using the concept of utopia.

Thompson sees the text as a window into a past world, as well:

The text presents us with a window into the intellectual world of the authors and tradents of the tradition's history and enables us to understand how they understood their past. In only a limited and very distorted way, however, does it let us glimpse the real world of the author's present.<sup>248</sup>

Relying on Michael Holquist's article below, I shall test the extent of the distortion one should expect when assessing the past through a utopia. My thesis

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<sup>245</sup> I use the term "author" and usually mean to include multiple authors, redactors of biblical texts, and authoring communities.

<sup>246</sup> I use the term "reader" in the following to include listeners, audiences, and interpreters for reasons of brevity.

<sup>247</sup> Ben Zvi, "Utopias, Multiple Utopias, and Why Utopias at All?," 4.

<sup>248</sup> Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People*, 126.



is concerned with investigating diachronic or a-chronic approaches to biblical utopias. Here I am concerned with the basic theoretical-methodological question whether utopia alone, without additional knowledge about the historical era in which it was produced, can be a method to derive historical fact from a text, rather than attempting to make statements about the biblical past.

From Holquist's<sup>249</sup> article, which deals exclusively with the relationship of utopia with reality, I derive a rather sceptical stance on the possibility of drawing a reliable conclusion about the author's reality. It is important to assess this question, because what a reader makes of the biblical text may not be what a historian makes of the text. This is one of the logical and perceptual difficulties when dealing with readings of texts that might be utopias. I conclude that reality derived by an interpreter from a utopia may be a thorough approximation of the author's reality, but I propose to acknowledge that the reconstructed reality must remain *a* reality according to *an* interpreter.

In the case of biblical texts, extra-textual evidence that might offer insight into the authoring community's situation, Suvin's "empirically verifiable properties around the author", could potentially be contributed by archaeology. Some argue that the history told in biblical books is a reliable source to reconstruct empirical circumstances near the creation of particular texts of the Bible. Since the utopian imagination has been called a fundamental human trait,<sup>250</sup> it might be permissible to add it to concepts and disciplines that might yield an insight into Bible composition, though as with most other statements about utopias in general, there will be some scholars who disagree.

The construction of imaginary worlds, free from the difficulties that beset us in reality, takes place in one form or another in many cultures. Such images are embedded in origin and destination myths, where the good life is not available to us in this world but is confined to a lost golden age or a world beyond death.<sup>251</sup>

This introductory statement by Ruth Levitas on the omnipresence of utopian images places the utopia among distinctly human intellectual efforts and

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<sup>249</sup> Holquist, "How to Play Utopia: Some Brief Notes on the Distinctiveness of Utopian Fiction."

<sup>250</sup> Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (London: Philip Allan, 1990), 2.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

beliefs. As early as 1954, Christopher Hawkes<sup>252</sup> expressed that the more “human” a trait, the harder it is to infer it from text-free archaeology (Hawkes’ ladder of inference).<sup>253</sup> Religion and spirituality, that is, intellectual efforts concerned with self-reflection and definition of the self, are the hardest to derive from text-independent archaeology. Utopia and related genres are evidence of human imaginative propensities and thus, at least in archaeological terms, according to Hawkes, difficult to derive from archaeological findings. Therefore, a productive approach to utopia could be called not so much “text-free archaeology” but rather “text-only archaeology”. What will be found in such “text-only” excavations depends on the epoch in which one conducts this “text-only archaeology”.

When it comes to history writing and utopia, if we have decided to read a biblical passage as utopia, it would be impossible to read it as reliable history writing at the same time. At least for the length of the discussion of the passage as utopia it is impossible to also read it as history writing. Utopia is an expression of the imagination of an altered version of a community, often projected into the future, the past, or a place far away. Its utopian content is not intended to be an accurate reflection of an author’s reality, even if the utopia is projected into the past. A crucial aspect of utopia is that it is not a faithful representation of reality, but the imaginative rendering of a radically altered situation extrapolated from issues arising in an author’s reality.

Utopian literature does not aim to deliver a realistic image of the author’s reality; the reality from which the utopia is extrapolated remains implicit. Some theorists (Suvin, Mannheim, Williams, for example) express the thought that the utopia may only be understandable as a utopia if the reality behind the text is known. Just like a parody is only fully understandable if one is familiar with the original, knowledge of the background is crucial to understanding a text as utopia.

The understanding of a utopia or the understanding of a text as utopia is dependent on at least three sign users or groups of sign users:

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<sup>252</sup> Christopher Hawkes, “Archeological Theory and Method: Some Suggestions from the Old World,” *American Anthropologist* 56, no. 2 (1954): 155–168.

<sup>253</sup> It is possible to infer from archaeological findings the modes of production and subsistence economics. Socio-political institutions are harder to infer and religion and spiritual life are hardest.

- the author, who leaves a trace of their perceived reality behind in the text they produce,
- the author's intended audience at the time of the production of the text, and
- any audience throughout time, that reads and reacts to the text in some way.

In reality there may be infinitely more recipients and creative forces involved in dealing with texts, taking into consideration translators and interpreters.<sup>254</sup>

The importance of the sign user is profound, because an object alone does not have meaning without cognition and interaction with the social subject:

This delimitation, which constitutes only the cognizable domain but also the possible ways of envisaging and cognizing it, cannot be established from the object alone but only from its interaction with the social subject whose pragmatic point of view or approach is defining the pertinence, and by that token constructing the object's cognitive identity (though not necessarily the extra-signic pre-existence of the object's elements etc.).<sup>255</sup>

There may be a problem with interpreting a utopia if it is only intelligible in conjunction with the empirical reality that gave rise to it. Often, the author's perceived reality is not explicitly explained to the reader, and the situation portrayed in the text is an inverse representation of a perceived reality according to an author.

The textual world seems to operate according to deceptively similar principles as an empirical world, but the "cognitive dissonance"<sup>256</sup> or the "cognitive estrangement"<sup>257</sup> the authoring group or the intended readership of a utopia would or should have been able to perceive when reading the utopia may not be perceivable to a reader unfamiliar with the particular reality to which the utopia is a response.

It would be a curious experiment to show somebody a parody of something and ask them to try and reconstruct the original without knowing anything about

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<sup>254</sup> In this respect, this project is different from those of Ehud Ben Zvi or Joseph Blenkinsopp, who read biblical passages as utopias to investigate the communities of literati that created and first received these texts. The approach taken here is more diachronic. I am considering Ben Zvi and Blenkinsopp's studies on the original audiences as examples of how utopian readings can be conducted, but I am also paying attention to the impact a text can have on audiences that are not members of the community in the late Persian period but the leader of a group of emigrants from England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and a secular reader who grew up in the 1990's respectively.

<sup>255</sup> Suvin, *Defined by a Hollow*, 113.

<sup>256</sup> Ben Zvi, "Utopias, Multiple Utopias, and Why Utopias at All?," 63.

<sup>257</sup> Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre."

it. It would certainly result in quite different reconstructions depending on the interpreter. It is possible that an objective reality cannot be reconstructed. There might be guesses at more or less convincing images of a possible past reality, but “The Truth” cannot be drawn from the utopia alone.

On the other hand, a parody will be recognisable as a parody by certain features even if the original is not known to the reader. Experienced sign-readers will have an idea that what they are reading may be referring back to something else the sign-reader is not aware of, either as a parody of a reality or as a utopian vision of an aspect of the author’s society the author thought of as needing improvement.

### **3.1.1. Relationship between the fiction and the author’s reality**

Many utopian theorists say that the utopia is a response to the author’s environment: “Almost by definition, utopias mediate between the ideal they propose and the actualities of the author’s own society.”<sup>258</sup> Jameson, who extrapolates from Marin, sees utopia as a practice of “mental operations to be performed on a determinate type of raw material given in advance which is contemporary society itself,”<sup>259</sup> that is, contemporary to the time of writing.

The response to reality or the interplay of a text with the author’s reality is not an exclusive trait of literary utopias. As Northrop Frye puts it, “We are concerned here with utopian literature, not with social attitudes; but literature is rooted in the social attitudes of its time.”<sup>260</sup> Even the utopian theorists and their different ways of expressing essentially similar thoughts shed light on the general time of their writing and their political orientation.

Manuel & Manuel cite and critique Mucchielli’s definition of utopia as a

myth, awakened by a personal revolt against the human condition in general in the shape of existing circumstances, which, meeting the obstacle of impotence, evokes in the imagination an *other* or a nowhere, where all obstacles are removed.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Robert H. Canary, “Utopian and Fantastic Dualities in Robert Graves’ *Watch the North Wind Rise*,” *Science Fiction Studies* 1, no. 4 (1974): 248–255.

<sup>259</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Of Islands and Trenches: Naturalization and the Production of Utopian Discourse,” *Diacritics* 7, no. 2 (1977): 6.

<sup>260</sup> Northrop Frye, “Varieties of Literary Utopias,” in *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, ed. Frank E. Manuel (London: Souvenir, 1965), 29.

<sup>261</sup> Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1979), 11–12.

The language used in this definition seems quite all-inclusive. Utopia is seen as a “myth”; myths evoke an association of a formative, ancient, and basic cultural explanation of the human condition. This “myth” not only critiques certain aspects of a society the author deems most relevant, but the “human condition in general” is “revolted” against. Furthermore, the originator of this myth is not just non-dominant but “impotent”. What can be drawn from Mucchielli’s definition of utopia is a clear idea that utopia is understood as being an all-encompassing, direct, and revolutionary response to existing circumstances.

Suvin expresses a different idea of the processes of utopia production. Utopia is seen not so much a “personal revolt” as in Mucchielli’s definition, but rather as the response by a social class:

The radical difference in perfection is in both cases judged from the point of view and within the value system of a discontented social class or congerie of classes, as refracted through the writer.<sup>262</sup>

Here, clearly, the operational definition takes into account class or classes and value systems (rather than the general human condition of Mucchielli). The utopia is not an expression by an isolated individual discontent, but the critique by a “class or congerie of classes” and, importantly, the utopia is the expression of the writer’s view of the value system.

It is worthwhile to consider the process of dystopia-writing, because both in utopia and dystopia current circumstances as perceived by the writer of the piece are analysed and extrapolated.

Every utopian writer has to struggle with the anxieties suggested to him by his own society, trying to distinguish the moral from the conventional, what would be really disastrous from what merely inspires a vague feeling of panic, uneasiness or ridicule.<sup>263</sup>

In the dystopia, the author analyses current circumstances to find tendencies which, projected into a fictional world in which they are fully developed, would be disastrous. Similarly, the utopian writer would focus on tendencies worth

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<sup>262</sup> Suvin, “Theses on Dystopia 2001,” 189.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 39.

critiquing and imagine a fictional world in which they would be overcome or absent.

The utopia's intention is not to represent reality, like a realist or naturalist novel might aim to do, but is still rooted in a reality as the author has interpreted it.

The problem with utopia is often not, therefore, that it represents an impossible noplacé, but that, all unconsciously, it represents a place we already know very well. Masking from itself, and from its readers, its ground in the dominant culture, utopia seeks to place the widest possible distance between its own procedures and those associated with the realist novel, which prides itself precisely on being deeply suffused by the ethos of the times.<sup>264</sup>

Peyser speaks about the utopian and realist novels in direct comparison. But the statement is true for the diachronic ideal typical utopia. The utopia is usually only implicitly concerned with its grounding in dominant culture, which it seeks to critique; therefore it would seem difficult to reconstruct the dominant culture based exclusively on the utopia, simply because the utopia does not make explicit statements about it. In Peyser's view, utopia and reality are almost paradoxically far removed from each other.

Another image to describe a utopia's relationship with reality comes from Suvin, who describes the utopia as a mirror of reality:

Whether island or valley, whether in space or (from the industrial and bourgeois revolutions on) in time, the new framework is correlative to the new inhabitants. The aliens – utopians, monsters, or simply differing strangers – are a mirror to man just as the different country is a mirror for his world.<sup>265</sup>

Northrop Frye and Louis Marin add another perspective to the problem of what utopia is in optical terms. Suvin calls utopia a "shocking mirror",<sup>266</sup> designed to reflect a distorted image of reality. Marin refers to the reality behind the utopia as a blind spot,<sup>267</sup> Frye sees the utopia as making reality visible. Frye writes, "[Utopia] does not lead to a desire to abolish sixteenth-century Europe

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<sup>264</sup> Thomas Peyser, *Utopia and Cosmopolis: Globalization in the Era of American Literary Realism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>265</sup> Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," 373.

<sup>266</sup> Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 54.

<sup>267</sup> Marin, *Utopics*, 93.

and replace it with Utopia, but it enables one to see Europe, and to work within it, more clearly.”<sup>268</sup> Frye is thus among those who see utopia as a heuristic device, not a proposition to bring about circumstances described in the utopia in a literal way.

This statement begs a question addressed below: which reality can be seen by which reader and how does what is seen differ when reading the Bible? Frye’s statement mentions sixteenth-century Europe. It is not said whether anyone reading Thomas More’s *Utopia* today would see sixteenth-century Europe or contemporary Europe, or what would happen if a reader of More were based in Africa, not in Europe. Utopias do not only exist for the audience they were first written for, but remain unchanged, even if societies that read and respond to the text change drastically throughout time.

There are at least two possible misunderstandings when approaching biblical literature and utopia. The first misunderstanding may happen if a reader does not recognise the utopian mirror, and the biblical text is understood as a direct representation of reality, despite being a convincing example of a literary utopia. The second misunderstanding is found on a less literal and more theoretical or scholarly level. I align myself with scholars who see utopia is a heuristic device; More’s island was not a political proposal that advocated using gold to make chamber pots. The meaning of a utopia is not located directly in the described improved circumstances, but between the description and its intended readers. If we read biblical utopias, therefore, we cannot simply claim that a community imagined, for example, certain dimensions of the Promised Land. We must read the Promised Land as a heuristic device that unfolded its true meaning between the description found in the biblical text and its intended audience, whose members did not see the imaginary boundaries in their experienced realities.

### **3.1.2. Diachronically changing audiences perceive different utopias**

What can be seen by looking at the distorted mirror image of a reality according to the author of a utopia? We can certainly see which aspects of reality the utopian author sees as important. As Varsam writes, speaking about dystopias:

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<sup>268</sup> Frye, “Varieties of Literary Utopias,” 36.

It is in this fiction that the reader may see what elements of reality the writer deems significant enough to extrapolate from in order to warn the reader of future, potentially catastrophic developments.<sup>269</sup>

Varsam explicitly mentions an important player in this utopian game: the reader. She says that the author writes the dystopia to warn the reader, but: which reader? Presumably the contemporary reader is meant, who will understand references to the elements of reality which are mirrored in a distorted way in the utopia or dystopia and who might be able to take action to avert the realisation of a dystopia. However, the contemporary reader is an imagined group that is hard to define clearly and must be considered anew for each utopian reading. In a diachronic ideal typical approach to utopia, both reader and utopia are rather abstract concepts and could potentially come from any culture at any time.<sup>270</sup>

The crucial aspect of diachronically changing readership is often left out of utopian theorists' discussions of the relationship between utopia and reality. For example, we find statements such as "in Sorel's view, the whole point of a utopia is to furnish a model with which the existing society can be compared and found wanting"<sup>271</sup> – another view of utopia as a heuristic device. "Existing society" is not a stable reference point. It is widely acknowledged that texts we are to think of as utopias or proto-utopias come down to us from the Renaissance, ancient Greece or the Bible. Moreover, utopian traits are found in a variety of different genres. It should be made clear more routinely by utopian theorists that specific utopian proposals are extrapolated from *an* existing society at a certain time, but, if extant, they can also be hypothetically linked to *all* existing societies with access to the text, at all times.

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<sup>269</sup> Maria Varsam, "Concrete Dystopia: Slavery and Its Others," in *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini (London: Routledge, 2003), 209. Utopia and dystopia have a similar core. In both cases, seen circumstances are isolated and fictionalised by an author, either made to disappear in the case of the utopia or made to be dominant in the dystopia.

<sup>270</sup> "[...] The idea of an active reader is a social problem, not only because the baggage brought to the texts is culturally derived, but also because the consumption of texts (even when performed alone) is always done within particular settings of society and history." James S. Bielo, *Words upon the Word: An Ethnography of Evangelical Group Bible Study* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 13.

<sup>271</sup> Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 59.



For the example of biblical utopias, we have a fairly certain locale of origin, a slightly less secure idea of dating depending on the passage, and a relative approximation of the authoring community. The hypothetical audience can be anyone with access to the text or its translations, from the “intended or primary readership”<sup>272</sup> of the late Persian period until today.

Ben Zvi’s and Blenkinsopp’s<sup>273</sup> answer to the question what a reader might look for in a utopian text (Chronicles, in their examples) is that a utopian reading “might help us to understand the impulse leading to the composition of Chronicles, hence what was important and authoritative for the author.”<sup>274</sup> Taking into account proposals cited above on how a utopian author extrapolates from reality what is deemed important enough to inform, warn, or instruct the reader about, the utopian approach would seem like a valuable method to approach a text with exactly this question in mind: what was authoritative for a text’s author or what were the circumstances seen in the author’s reality that are mirrored in the utopia? One would simply have to reverse the images in the text, it would seem.

However, there are several problems. The first and most basic one is that some pre-More texts need to be declared to be utopias first. Another problem is how certain a reader from a far removed society can be that the utopia really addresses a direct lack in society perceived by an author from a different era and a different culture. Ruth Levitas cites A.L. Morton:

“In the beginning utopia is an image of desire”, and while it later “grows more complex and various”, developing into an elaborate means of satire and social criticism, it is still “always... based on something that somebody actually wants.”<sup>275</sup>

Utopia changes from an expression of a concrete desire into a literary genre associated with abstract social critique and from there can change into a conventional form that survives on its commercial popularity.<sup>276</sup> There are many examples of texts which were created as responses or sequels to an original

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<sup>272</sup> Ben Zvi, “Utopias, Multiple Utopias, and Why Utopias at All?,” 72.

<sup>273</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Ideology and Utopia in 1–2 Chronicles,” in *What Was Authoritative for Chronicles?*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Diana Edelman (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 89–103.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>275</sup> Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 29.

<sup>276</sup> Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Utopia, Ltd.* is one example of mocking the genre’s conventions, popularity, and omnipresence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

utopian text which proved to be very popular.<sup>277</sup> Not all utopias must necessarily be a direct response to the author's perceived need; a utopia could be a satirical response to the popularity of another utopia.

Utopia can be more complex than just being an expression of direct wishful thinking and I would question that it is “‘always [...] based on something that somebody actually wants.’”<sup>278</sup> Especially when reading the Bible as utopia, the variance to be expected when reading Chronicles, for instance, and then reading Numbers as utopia is significant. Not only do we have multiple hypotheses about multiple authors or redactors spread over a period of hundreds of years. The texts may have been produced in a period far removed in time from the period they claim to speak about. Is a utopian image in the book of Numbers a direct response to a need in the late Persian period or could it be part of a convention that was transmitted in a culture for hundreds of years (and since it may have been hundreds of years, one should probably not speak of one culture, but multiple cultures)?

It is likely that utopian images, especially those found in pentateuchal texts, are not a pure rendition of a desire by a community at a time, but a web of cultural, traditional, and topical references from across different periods. For example, the wilderness narratives from Numbers are referenced elsewhere in the Bible. Certain utopian aspects of the Promised Land may be subject to changes in the retellings of these stories. A story might change into a stock motif or poetic trope, rather than being an expression of a direct want, just as the stories from Numbers change into poetic references expressing an ambiguous attitude towards the past in Psalms or the prophetic books.

Questions about the primary audience of a text or the reality the text's authors encountered are certainly not the only research questions that can be asked of a reading of a text as utopia. Audiences are an elusive and fascinating part of every utopia, and especially of biblical utopias; whether the intended, primary audience the author may have been in direct contact with, or the accidental audience to which the text is transmitted, but whose members were not a concern on the original author's mind. One feature of the biblical text that

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<sup>277</sup> Roemer, *Utopian Audiences*, 33. Roemer specifically deals with Bellamy's utopia *Looking Backward*. Also see Jean Pfaelzer, *The Utopian Novel in America, 1886-1896: The Politics of Form* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), 50.

<sup>278</sup> Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 29.

classical utopias such as More's lack is religious authority and being part of an authoritative canon.<sup>279</sup>

Some utopian critics would exclude religion from utopia, saying that religion is concerned with a world beyond this world, whereas utopia is concerned with the possibility of attaining a changed state of being, not in heaven or paradise, but in this world.<sup>280</sup> As I will argue below when discussing William Bradford's augmentation of reality using Numbers 13, whether a vision is concerned with a transcendental realm or an empirical reality does not only depend on the text, but on the text in conjunction with its reader. The Garden of Eden would seem other-worldly and transcendental. If the Garden of Eden is read alongside Columbus' letters, the Garden of Eden appears in Columbus' understanding of his reality (or the reality he decided to portray in his letters). The distinctive difference between a utopia such as Thomas More's and utopian images in the Bible is that believers may take the biblical utopia literally, or use it as a template to interpret their reality. It does not matter then, where utopia is located within the story – heaven, paradise or Cloud Cuckoo Land – but rather, where the reader of the story wants to locate it.

Taking the text literally or forcing it into one's reality is something that would hardly happen with classical utopias such as Thomas More's. More's *Utopia* is clearly a work of fiction. The historicity of *Utopia* is the historical person Thomas More and to some extent Book One, in which fictional characters discuss the political situation in England. Even if a community attempts to establish a utopian intentional community, Raphael Hythloday's

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<sup>279</sup> The canon and its authority are more or less authoritative and more or less fixed at different time periods as Ben Zvi points out: "There are and were multiple 'Bibles', not only one for each different period, but also often several in the same period, among different groups. None of these, however, existed in late Persian Yehud." Ehud Ben Zvi, "Reading and Constructing Utopias: Utopia/s And/in the Collection of Authoritative Texts/Textual Readings of Late Persian Period Yehud," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* (published online 2013): 3, doi:10.1177/0008429813488344.

<sup>280</sup> "There is in principle a fundamental contradiction between religion and utopia. As Moses Finley has said, 'utopia transcends the given social reality; it is not transcendental in a metaphysical sense.' Religion typically has an other-worldly concern; utopia's interest is in this world. The idea of paradise by itself does nothing to reconcile this opposition of interest." Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia*, 10. Similarly, Suvin: "It [religion] is directed either towards Heaven (transcendence) or towards Middlesex (bounded empirical environment). In either case it is incompatible with a non-transcendental overstepping of empirical boundaries. The *telos* of religion is, finally, eternity or timelessness, not history." Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 43.

account of his visit to the fictional island would not be taken literally.<sup>281</sup> There are many safeguards against literal readings in More's text, starting with the telling name Hythlodæus, "knowing in nonsense"<sup>282</sup> and of course the fundamental pun of *ou/eu-topia*.

Whether the Bible, or a passage in it, is fiction or should be read as fiction is a sensitive topic. The Bible is not understood by everyone as a collection of fictional stories, which results in multiple possibilities for biblical utopias. They could be understood as historical political fictions, expressing a wish, a power-fantasy or a social critique by a specific group of authors with specific intentions for their intended audience (as Ben Zvi shows, drawing upon the concept of utopia in conjunction with pre-existing historical assumptions about the period<sup>283</sup>). Biblical utopias could also be understood by believers (past, present, and future) as literal instructions on how to attain a place in heaven, as a reliable prediction of the (second) coming of the Messiah, as instructions on how to attain salvation, as proof of divine providence etc.

In past and present, people have used utopian images from the Bible as a heuristic device, to interpret a reality. "The pragmatic presuppositions about the signs' possible uses by their users [...] necessarily inscribe historical reality – as understood by the users – between the lines of any text."<sup>284</sup> Columbus expected to find Eden. Eden is quite well attested on maps, still thought of as potentially findable or as an empirical historical place. Puritans interpreted New England in biblical terms as their "New English Canaan", transplanting the biblical "Promised Land" into their reality.<sup>285</sup> In this sense the Bible is conceptually related to utopias by being a heuristic device which generates its meaning between text and a reader's application of it to their reality.

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<sup>281</sup> Examples of intentional communities are Robert Owen's community at New Harmony – an experiment which lasted all of three years (1824-1827) – and other communities during the same time, all of which had dissolved by 1829. Owen would not have called these communities utopian, in fact he perceived the term as derogatory, because he felt that his approach to changing existing society was scientifically grounded, not imaginary. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America*, 64, 151.

<sup>282</sup> Marin, *Utopics*, 89.

<sup>283</sup> Ben Zvi, "Reading and Constructing Utopias." Ben Zvi, "Utopias, Multiple Utopias, and Why Utopias at All?"

<sup>284</sup> Suvin, *Defined by a Hollow*, 112.

<sup>285</sup> For example Thomas Morton and Charles Francis Adams, *New English Canaan of Thomas Morton* (New York, B. Franklin, 1967), <http://archive.org/details/newenglishcanaa00adamgoog>. Accessed October 30th, 2013.

In addition to interpreters like Bradford or Morton, there is the vast amount of literalist, historicist, symbolist, minimalist, and other interpretations in biblical studies alone. The hermeneutic circle closes and after so many different treatments, the text has changed. It cannot be approached objectively anymore. By becoming sign users, and by reacting to the text, we have inscribed, in Suvin's words again, "historical reality [...] between the lines of [the] text," our own historical reality or an approximation of somebody else's historical reality.

### **3.1.3. Utopias can only be fully understood with knowledge of the reality behind them**

Raymond Williams and Darko Suvin are pessimistic that a utopia is even recognisable as a utopia if the reality it is extrapolated from is not known. Williams states that "indeed, the variability of the utopian situation, the utopian impulse, and the utopian result is crucial to the understanding of utopian fiction."<sup>286</sup> Furthermore, in socialist thought, it is important, which alternative circumstances are envisaged in the utopia and what they are. For example, More identifies with "small owners; his laws regulate and protect but also compel labour"<sup>287</sup> and writes about a willed transformation, with free consumption and a cooperative subsistence economy. Bacon, on the other hand, envisages technical transformation, a specialised social order, industrial economy and mastery of nature.

This thought together with the statement cited above, that situation, impulse, and result are crucial to understanding the utopia, would seem to mean that the utopian text on its own is almost meaningless unless we can be certain that the images were used because their author was biased towards a specific class and came from a specific social situation, which inspired him to use a specific set of images.

Suvin's outlook on the possibility of recognising utopia if the reader is not a native inhabitant of the Zero World – the author's empirical reality – is rather pessimistic. The utopia offers an

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<sup>286</sup> Williams, *Culture and Materialism*, 224.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 225.

[...] alternative formal framework functioning by explicit or implicit reference to the author's empirical environment. Without this reference, nonutopian readers having no yard stick for comparison, could not understand the alternative novelty.<sup>288</sup>

Karl Mannheim, quite similarly, writes: "In other words, the key to the intelligibility of utopias is the structural situation of that social stratum which at any given time espouses them."<sup>289</sup> These statements seem to imply that without thorough knowledge of the circumstances that gave rise to the utopia, the reader may not be able to even recognise the text as a utopia.

I understand Suvin's non-utopian readers to be readers who are neither members of the protagonist community or the utopia's intended readership, nor natives of the place and time where the utopia originated. Some utopias are quite explicit about referring to the circumstances criticised through the utopia. Bellamy's *Looking Backward* is an example of a utopia that makes frequent direct reference to the author's and protagonist's home society, late 19<sup>th</sup> century Boston. Campanella's *The City of the Sun* is an example of another extreme: this utopia "seldom glances at the opposing forces that brought it into being."<sup>290</sup>

For this specific example of a utopia – *The City of the Sun* – we have knowledge of the socio-political environment at the time of its production: Campanella was a Dominican priest, persecuted by the Inquisition and imprisoned for most of his life.<sup>291</sup> Depending on how much a reader knows about the background of the utopia, the non-utopian reader may be able to understand the utopia from a different historical or cultural background to some extent, but a fuller understanding of the utopia is enabled by knowledge of the cultural background, especially if the utopia (as in the example of *The City of the Sun*) does not make frequent explicit references to the historical situation that formed its background.

Ben Zvi approaches biblical utopias not just as a scholar of utopia, but also as an ancient historian. He would be a non-utopian reader in Suvin's terms. Since there is some consensus about the general social setting of the production

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<sup>288</sup> Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 53.

<sup>289</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 187.

<sup>290</sup> James Dougherty, "Geometries of Perfection: Atlantis, Utopia and the City of the Sun," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 69, no. 3 (1986): 313.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

of biblical books, biblical scholars reading the Bible as utopia have some way of estimating the “precise social and class situation”<sup>292</sup> that gave rise to the biblical utopia.

However, with biblical utopian readings, one should be careful not to argue in circles. Can we extract a clue about the social setting from the biblical utopia and then use this clue about the social setting to argue that the text is a utopia? This circular argument makes one agree with Suvin after all; the non-utopian reader will not understand the text as a utopia without knowledge of the Zero World. We can amend: the non-utopian reader will not understand the text as a utopia without knowledge of the Zero World, but this knowledge must not be extracted from the text itself.

#### **3.1.4. Conclusion of 3.1**

Back to the initial question: can we reconstruct the blind spot of historical reality by relying on the fiction of the utopia as our only informant? The wealth of literature that already exists about biblical literature makes it difficult to pretend that the text does not come with any presuppositions or knowledge attached to it. Attempting to read nothing but the text seems only hypothetically possible, in an impossibly sterile lab environment.

To some extent, it is certainly possible to reconstruct an original from a parody without knowing anything about the original. This enterprise may, however, result in *The Nightmare Before Christmas*.<sup>293</sup> The text the reader is reading is an inverse representation of a world according to an author, about whom the hypothetical reader has no direct information. The world portrayed in the fiction operates according to deceptively similar principles as the reader’s own world.

Some skeletal parameters may be known to the reader. The reader knows that a utopia is concerned with central lacks, extrapolated from a perceived reality. In the film *The Nightmare before Christmas*, the character Jack Skellington from Halloween World encounters Christmas. He understands that he is encountering a holiday at which presents are given by somebody named (misheard by Jack in accordance with the scary Halloween traditions he knows

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<sup>292</sup> Williams, *Culture and Materialism*, 224.

<sup>293</sup> Henry Selick, *The Nightmare before Christmas* (Walt Disney Studios, 1993).

best) “Sandy Claws”. Those are the skeletal parameters known. When Jack decides to organise Christmas, the details are put into reality from the point of view of a very different society (namely, Halloween World) and the details are misunderstood, because the local colour of Halloween is imposed on the strange world of Christmas (“Sandy Claws” instead of Santa Claus). The conclusion of the film is that Christmas-according-to-Halloween becomes a distortion, because the world of Christmas is misinterpreted and misunderstood by the inhabitants of Halloween World.

Each interpreter comes from Halloween World and tries to understand Christmas with only comparatively few hints about the general parameters. Some may be able to construct a convincing historical reality, relying on the skeletal parameters known about the text and circumstances of its creation. Others may remain forever Halloween and may produce an unconvincing and distorted picture of what they think is Christmas reality.

I have presented above the perspectives of different utopian theorists on how utopia is related to reality, and have added to the existing discussion an emphasis on the importance of changing audiences in the interpretation of a text. The arguments presented above could also be applied to extracting historical reality from any text, not just the utopian text, if the period of origin of the text is far removed in time and the process of writing and redacting the text is complex. It is possible and conceivable to try to argue that the Bible represents history, as long as the interpreter is willing to admit that the history they extract from it is not *the* history, but what the interpreter thinks history may have been. Reading with the concept of utopia and utopian theory in view, one should be automatically aware that it is conceivable that an author presents a fictional reality that is purposely crafted to mirror another reality, and that the true impact or meaning exists non-explicitly between text and its intended reader.

### **3.2. *Playing utopia with Michael Holquist***

Holquist’s article<sup>294</sup> focuses on how exactly a utopia abstracts reality. Other discussions often mention only in passing the process by which utopia is

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<sup>294</sup> Holquist, “How to Play Utopia: Some Brief Notes on the Distinctiveness of Utopian Fiction.”



extrapolated from historical reality. Holquist's article is discussed here at length to support a pessimistic perspective on the question of whether we can reconstruct reality by looking only at utopia. Utopia, as an ideal typical genre, has the capacity of being a meaningful entity in its own right when it is read detached from a direct perceived societal lack. An individual utopia may have been extrapolated from a direct need at some point, but since it is often transmitted through time and cultures, it may very well be read detached from its cultural origin in a later or culturally different setting.

### **3.2.1. Game rules: utopia and chess**

Holquist proposes that there are game rules by which utopia abstracts reality. He does not give instructions on how to reverse this abstraction, possibly because most utopian theorists deal with texts or phenomena that can be more clearly attributed to an individual author and a specific year than the Bible.

The article postulates that all utopias are a type of game, and that they are similar to the game of chess in the way they abstract reality. Holquist says that the game of chess was invented to portray battles, but it does so in a way that is so abstract, and subjected to such strict rules that it manages to transform the chaos of a real battle into something neater, almost perfectly neat. "Just as no battle, no matter how strategically sound, is ever as neat as a chess game, so is no society as coherent as utopia."<sup>295</sup> Utopia, according to him, does something similar: it simplifies real society into an abstraction:

Utopia has in common with chess first of all the general characteristic that it is a simplification, a radical stylization of something which in experience is of enormous complexity, often lacking any apparent symmetry. Chess substitutes for war, utopia for society.<sup>296</sup>

Utopia is an abstracted, simplified representation of a real society, lacking real and realistic idiosyncrasies.<sup>297</sup> Furthermore, it is an abstraction according to the perception of one author, who reacts in the utopia to circumstances she or he found worth critiquing. In addition to this, "the tension is between the world

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 111.

outside the work, and the world it encloses, thus the contrast is often implicit.”<sup>298</sup> Up to this point, Holquist argues perfectly in line with most other utopian theorists: utopia is linked to a reality, but the reality is frequently implicit in the utopian text.

### **3.2.2. The abstraction gains independent meaning**

The thought that follows when one compares utopias and the game of chess is that the stylisation loses its original referent when it becomes conventional. This thought is something new Holquist adds to the discussion of utopia. Many utopian theorists seem to regard utopia as more or less a direct representation of a need, or of an earnest and pro-active revolutionary desire to change one’s own society. Holquist’s article acknowledges that the abstraction is likely to take on a new meaning of its own and the comparison with chess makes this idea perfectly clear.

The abstraction and its rules become conventional and the reality that inspired the game disappears. Do chess players actually think about chess as a derivation from a battle or would certain chess moves or strategies by famous players be on a player’s mind? The abstraction remains as a disconnected reality in its own right. Holquist describes how the game of chess, itself an abstraction of battle, has taken on a meaningful life of its own. He speaks of medieval chess moralities which seek to attribute allegorical meaning to the pieces and moves,<sup>299</sup> and mentions chess sets designed to represent historical figures, such as Napoleon.<sup>300</sup>

Chess has come full circle; according to legend, it was invented as an abstraction of a battle, but then has come to be the bearer of symbolic meaning for vices and virtues, and finally, by making chess men who resemble Napoleon and the Duke of Wellington, it has been symbolically resuscitated to represent battle once more. But note what has happened: the chess-battle between the chess men resembling Napoleon and the Duke of Wellington does not have a

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 115. A similar thought is expressed again: “In the study of utopias it is a commonplace that there exists a bond between the imaginary land presented in a given fiction, and the actual society in which it was written.” Ibid., 118.

<sup>299</sup> Holquist, “How to Play Utopia: Some Brief Notes on the Distinctiveness of Utopian Fiction,” 115.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 116.

predetermined outcome, because it is independent of history. On the chess board, Napoleon might yet win.

Utopia, Holquist says, is like a chess set consisting of pieces that resemble historical figures. But while these pieces resemble historical realities, in the game play, the outcome of battles is open again. In utopia, he says, it is possible to recognise historical realities. However, the game is not played according to historical fact, but according to the rules of utopia.<sup>301</sup>

### **3.2.3. Application of Holquist to reconstruction of reality based on utopia**

If utopia is an abstraction of a social reality, like chess is an abstraction of a battle, it sounds like it should be possible to reconstruct that reality. But if we consider chess as an abstraction of battle (before enlarging chess again to represent historical battles whose outcome is open again, in the game), chess is an abstraction of all battles, or of all realities. All the moves in chess have already been there, since they are already inherent in the chess pieces and the rules.<sup>302</sup>

Looking at it like this, it seems impossible to precisely reconstruct from infinitely many possibilities of a game any actual historical battle event. If utopia really is like chess in the ways it is abstracted from reality, it seems that we could not reconstruct an historical event from just one example (like from one game of chess), because the abstraction, with its own game rules, is completely disconnected from reality.

Holquist's theory about the abstractions at work in utopia or chess does not enable us to say with any confidence that reality can be derived from a utopian sample. We would have to start at the reality and then see how it is abstracted in its utopian version.

However, Holquist also writes that, "Utopias deal with much more concrete tensions, problems that bear a much closer relationship to specific historical conflicts between various economic, legal, religious systems etc."<sup>303</sup> Since the

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>302</sup> "It suddenly struck me that every move in chess was old and had already been played by someone. Perhaps our history has already been played too, and we shift our figures with the same moves to the same checks as in times long past." Karel Čapek, *War with the Newts*, trans. M. Weatherall and R. Weatherall (London: Penguin, 2010), 188.

<sup>303</sup> Holquist, "How to Play Utopia: Some Brief Notes on the Distinctiveness of Utopian Fiction," 116.

relationship between utopia and social reality is closer than the relationship between chess and a battle, maybe cautious statements can be made about the historical reality behind utopia after all, especially since some general skeletal parameters are known.

#### **3.2.4. Critique of Holquist**

There are some flaws in Holquist's comparison. Though on a large scale the theory that society is abstracted into utopia just like a battle is abstracted into chess seems to work, there are some issues, one of which might be simply that utopias are linguistic artefacts, whereas chessmen are a material artefact. Games might be recorded, but their primary manifestation seems to be the actual game, not its record. In utopia, the most apparent artefact that remains is the final result of the thought processes of the author.

Chess pieces are designed differently depending on the time period and culture in which the game is played,<sup>304</sup> while the rules are subject to only minor changes in conventions. Retrograde analysis, in which a game of chess is reconstructed by analysing backwards from the final checkmate situation, is only possible because the game rules are fixed and known. Even in retrograde analysis, however, the analyst must know where and when the game was played, since chess rules vary slightly depending on historical era and local conventions.<sup>305</sup> The initial set-up of the pieces on the board, which too can differ very slightly depending on time and culture, will be known to the analyst. The originating society, the Zero World, of utopia will be known only if the utopia can be fairly precisely dated, and is not as neat as the start of a game of chess, which only has 32 initial variables, the pieces.

Utopias will also be different depending on the prevalent conventions during the era of their production, but utopia does not have codified rules, as chess does. There is no rule, except for convention or fashion, that the utopian protagonist must first describe the landscape he encounters in utopia, for example. Nor must a protagonist or an author explicitly describe her or his home society.

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<sup>304</sup> There are *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Simpsons* chess sets, for example.

<sup>305</sup> The possibilities and limitations of retrograde analyses of historical chess games are demonstrated in Arturo Pérez-Reverte, *The Flanders Panel*, trans. Margaret Jull Costa (San Diego: Harvest Books, 2004).

Chess pieces, moreover, exist independently of a player. The meaning transferred onto the pieces by players will stay largely the same, too. A knight will always move in a certain pattern, the loss of a queen will always be grave because of the flexibility of the piece. The meaning transferred onto elements of a utopia can change drastically from what the author wanted the elements to signify to the author's contemporary intended audience, to the meaning a reader from another culture, linguistic background, or era may transfer onto the utopia.

Essentially, the question asked here is whether a retrograde analysis of a utopia is possible, in which the utopian fictional society is reversed step by step until we arrive at the beginning situation, the historical society it is extrapolated from. The most convincing answer is that it is not possible to use retrograde analysis on utopia to conclude on the original society behind it. Holquist's comparison of utopia to chess has found a problematic parallel at best, but it is valuable because it allows us to see how many variables and factors there are in utopia as opposed to other abstractions, such as chess.

A retrograde analysis of utopia, in theory, might look like this. Let the utopia be the checkmate situation of a historical game of chess. Let the starting set-up be the historical society from which the utopia is extrapolated. To run this analysis the general parameters we must know have to be the historical era and the culture in which the game was played, as this will determine the way some pieces move and the starting situation we need to eventually arrive at. For some utopias we will have this data. For biblical utopias we do not, since they might be constructed from traditions, texts, and stories from different eras. It is as if we were trying to reconstruct a game of chess played according to ever so slightly different rules for each move. It would take a historian or a chess historian to reconstruct this game, who is familiar with each of the different periods and styles. The dating of each individual move needs to be known and the options pieces may have had at their disposal. If for any reason a piece has more than one option available, the retrograde analysis may become too muddled to derive an unambiguous progression of moves.

The biggest problem in this comparison is that the utopia is written by an author with a specific opinion about which particular set of priorities of which societal variables ought to be portrayed in the utopia. This important variable is completely absent from chess. The players are merely abiders of rules, not

agents who can actively manipulate the outcome independently from game rules. They have the same number of the same chess pieces at their disposal. It does not depend on a player's social situation, rank, belief, or gender, which pieces this player might select to play with. As mentioned above, the starting situation of chess will be the same, and known. The starting situation of utopia, the empirical reality of the author or the Zero World, is not as clearly known to the analyst and not limited to two identical sets of 16 pieces.

## 4. A Utopian Reading of Numbers 13

### *Chapter summary*

As the previous chapter concluded that utopia is not a reliable means to reconstruct realities from a text, this chapter is concerned with what *can* be seen if a text is read as utopia. To do this, the case study Numbers 13 will be introduced as a potential utopia, adding a new and challenging reading of the passage to those already in existence.

The features of Numbers 13 which exhibit family resemblance to utopias are the description of the land flowing with milk and honey and the report of the harvest of an unusually large cluster of grapes. Another important utopian feature is the utopian map. Numbers 13 includes the description of a route and several place names. Utopian map theory by Louis Marin will be used to read the geographical features of Numbers 13 as a utopian feature.

The chapter considers if the passage Numbers 13 is made into an anachronistic utopia by its authoritative commentators or if it is a biblical proto-utopia. I use the example of Martin Noth's commentary on this passage, which – for my purposes – shows that the geographical descriptions included in Numbers 13 appear to be a utopia to a modern reader in the sense of not being graphically representable or locatable on an empirical map. Noth's reading is instrumentalised to show family resemblances between the passage and utopian literature.

I compare elements of the biblical text to stock elements found in many modern utopias, to do with describing and moving fictional characters in a fictional landscape. After making these comparisons I state that Numbers 13 is utopian to a higher degree than it is an accurate historical description of a journey or a location.

I present an inner-biblical argument that compares the geography of Numbers 13 with another geography, more frequently considered to be utopian,

which is found in the book of Ezekiel. Arguing from this biblical parallel, Numbers 13 may have been a proto-utopia even to those creating and first circulating it.

The chapter concludes by saying that taking a utopian map – specifically the utopia of Numbers 13 – to represent reality can have precarious consequences. This chapter starts to construct a warning label that warns of taking a biblical utopia literally.

#### **4.1. *Numbers 13 and utopian maps***

In Numbers 13, 12 Israelite spies are sent by their leader Moses to explore a land, supposedly promised to the Israelites by their god YHWH. The pattern of this passage is similar to the pattern of classical utopias: travellers leave a point of origin, travel to an unknown place with fantastic properties, explore that place, encounter inhabitants, and return to their point of origin to tell the story about how the newly found place differs from their home society.

In Numbers 13 the place explored is the land of Canaan, the point of origin a camp in the desert. The improvement observed by the travellers, which would make the place utopian by being comparatively more perfect than the home society, is found in the description of the land, which the spies deliver upon their return: “We came to the land to which you sent us and indeed, it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.”<sup>306</sup> The fruit mentioned here is an unusually large cluster of grapes, cut down by the spies in the land of Canaan (Num 13:23).

Superficially, the utopian improvement in the utopian land of Canaan is guaranteed subsistence which seems to require little effort in agriculture. As I argue in chapter 6 “Utopia and Dystopia in Numbers 13”, other utopian features can be added to this utopian inventory: for example, the hope of gaining control of fortified cities, significantly changing from a nomadic community into a sedentary one. If one were to read Numbers 13 as part of a larger *Heilsgeschichte* one can certainly argue that the idea of an Israelite nation under divine rule is part of the utopian construction of the Promised Land.

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<sup>306</sup> Translations of the biblical text are my own unless indicated otherwise, using the *BHS* Hebrew text.



The following reading focuses on mapping and toponyms in Numbers 13 and critically engages interpretations which historicise the biblical text to some degree by attempting (and failing) to locate each place on a historical or contemporary map. There is a fundamental difficulty if an exegete attempts to render an ancient map or map-like description supplied by a source text as a physical, unambiguous map. The reality from which the utopia was extrapolated, was encoded in such a way that it becomes impossible to reconstruct it with certainty. Likewise, the recoding of a text describing topographical features into a modern-day map or the recoding of an ancient toponym into a contemporary toponym is problematic. We can attempt to reconstruct the original reality and we can attempt to draw a biblical map, but the reconstruction is incomplete if it does not contain at least an earnest warning to the reader that the newly drawn map is merely one out of many possible interpretations.

The difficulty of attempting to draw the map described in a text has been recognised by utopian theorists. Drawing on their observations regarding the transformation of a fictional world into a map – why this happens and how it is done – I will argue that the outline of the Promised Land as given in Numbers 13 is a utopian feature that enables us to read Numbers 13 as a literary utopia from a contemporary point of view. The utopian map, when seen in conjunction with the attempts to draw the biblical map in reality, transforms the biblical text into a utopia to the contemporary reader.

Scholars who have dealt with the feature of the map in utopian literature include Louis Marin, Darko Suvin, and Margaret Atwood. These scholars see maps as a recurring theme, often included at the beginning of a utopia to establish the environment in which the utopia is played out. Utopian maps are paradoxical because they are representations of a fictional “no-place”, and as such they are not easily graphically representable: “[Utopia] abounds in maps, but it is not photographable.”<sup>307</sup>

Theses by Marin on utopian maps have been applied to Chronicles by Boer. Brodsky and Na’aman discuss the utopian map in Ezekiel. Here, especially Noth’s commentary on Numbers 13 is used to argue that the map of Numbers 13

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<sup>307</sup> Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 190.

can sooner be compared to utopian maps as described by Marin, Atwood, or Suvin as well as to the utopian map of Ezekiel 47, than to any real map of either an ancient or contemporary geographical area.

#### **4.1.1. Utopian maps represent fictional environments**

Louis Marin writes: “The utopian representation always takes the figure, the form of a map.”<sup>308</sup> This leads to another observation, namely that utopia represents not just one but all possibilities. “[Utopia] gives a location to all journeys, all itineraries, all voyages and their paths: all of them are potentially present because they are all there, but implicitly it negates them all.”<sup>309</sup> Holquist,<sup>310</sup> as mentioned above, conveys a similar thought in his comparison of utopia and chess, when he speaks about the game of chess opening up the possibility of re-enacting not just one battle, but all possible battles, completely detached from the outcome of any historical battle.

Utopia, according to Marin, could potentially represent any or all journeys. The map, however, narrows down the possibilities and so enables the description of one journey out of all journeys that are theoretically possible in utopia. I will return to this observation below, when discussing how the structure and journey of Numbers 13 are employed to highlight the behaviour of certain characters to stress their righteousness. Furthermore, the idea that any map is theoretically possible will be used to approach Noth’s interpretation of the biblical passage. Noth has decided to use the utopian potential of Number 13, which he may not have been aware of, to represent one specific map.

The map in utopia can make the fictional, unreal place seem realistic, or “the locus has become space”,<sup>311</sup> which enables one story to emerge from all possible stories: “With that figure [the mapped, projected journey], a narrative begins, with a before and an after, a point of departure and a point of arrival, a happy coming-back or a final permanent exile.”<sup>312</sup> The map is the first authorial decision necessary when a utopia is designed, since it defines and limits the space into which the utopia is projected. Inside the area defined and limited by

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<sup>308</sup> Marin, “The Frontiers of Utopia,” 13.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Holquist, “How to Play Utopia: Some Brief Notes on the Distinctiveness of Utopian Fiction.”

<sup>311</sup> Marin, “The Frontiers of Utopia,” 13.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

the invented map, the author can be omniscient (if she so wishes). In that way, the map can maximise the locus' possibilities, by creating and limiting the space.<sup>313</sup>

In literary utopias the topographical features are often presented first (examples are provided below), before the radically different socio-political situation is described. Most of the time, nothing too strange or unfamiliar can be seen in the topography of the place at first sight. The description of topography and the initial survey of infrastructure in utopias quite often foreshadow the encounter with inhabitants. Frequently it is only when the inhabitants of the conventional environment are encountered, that the narrator begins to notice differences between his familiar society and the radically different one.

The utopian map represents a location that would not strike a reader as completely fantastic. The tell-tale sign found in many literary utopias that makes clear that the place is still to be considered to be a "no-place" is often that it is located only vaguely (if at all) on a map of the empirical globe.<sup>314</sup> It is designed to seem realistic, because the utopia does not aim to present a fantastic world too different to be recognisable but to present a changed socio-political situation that seems possible enough to potentially inspire action to bring about the proposed change. A "key function of a utopian text is its ability to encourage readers to visualize the non-existent."<sup>315</sup>

Supplying a map, like describing the details of a landscape or cityscape in a story, can be an indicator that the place described is not known (or does not exist), either to the author,<sup>316</sup> or to the reader: "If you're writing about a real

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<sup>313</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith describes "mapping" as a way to create and at the same time to limit space to "maximise" possibilities as well. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 292.

<sup>314</sup> Thomas More, as with so many features of the utopian literary genre, established this convention: "By the way, More's a bit worried because he doesn't know the exact position of the island. As a matter of fact Raphael did mention it, but only very briefly and incidentally, as though he meant to return to the question later – and, for some unknown reason, we were both fated to miss it. You see, just as Raphael was touching on the subject, a servant came up to More and whispered something in his ear. And although this made me listen with even greater attention, at the critical moment one of his colleagues started coughing rather loudly – I suppose he'd caught cold on the boat – so that the rest of Raphael's sentence was completely inaudible." More, *Utopia*, 34.

<sup>315</sup> Roemer, *Utopian Audiences*, 60.

<sup>316</sup> Atwood's examples of maps of invented places include the maps of Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea Trilogy*, Tolkien's maps in *Lord of the Rings* and layout plans given in some country-house murder mysteries. Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 70–71.

city, a well-known one, the maps of it already exist and the reader can look them up, but if you're writing about an unknown location, they don't."<sup>317</sup>

The utopian map is included to open up the space of the story; it maintains utopia's basic pun, because even though a map is included, we often find clues in the text that give the place away as in fact not locatable on any empirical map. Finally, the map may be a sign that the author needed to construct a map for herself because the place to be described was not known to her either.

All these features of utopian maps can be put to a simple test for their utopian-ness, which is to attempt to represent them graphically. A characteristic of maps in utopia is that the maps of utopia are not coherent. They cannot be retraced or found in empirical reality:

[...] Raphael's [protagonist of More's *Utopia*] story is less concerned with narrating travel than it is with displaying a map, but a map whose essential characteristic consists of not being another map. Or being in maps, it cannot exactly be found in them.<sup>318</sup>

The aspect of the elusive map, which purports to be an orientation mark but when tested for its graphical representability confirms its own fiction, is an important feature of the utopian map, which will be discussed for the case study of Numbers 13 below. Noth and Na'aman supply failed attempts at representing the map of Numbers 13.

An aspect addressed both by Marin and by Atwood are the margins or edges of maps. As said above, in a utopia the author can use the limited space to maximise possibilities – to become omniscient within the utopia. The edges of the maps are not usually a theme in utopia,<sup>319</sup> possibly because the author would have to admit that outside of the fictional map she is not omniscient anymore, and that even questions such as how exactly to implement the proposed utopian society in the real world would be asking too much.

However, margins and transitional spaces, though uncomfortable spaces in clearly drawn utopias, are of importance when discussing utopias and their links

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>318</sup> Marin, "The Frontiers of Utopia," 15.

<sup>319</sup> One example of using the presence of an edge is found in the 19<sup>th</sup> century techno-utopia *Mizora*. Taking a trip to the edge of the utopian land Mizora, the protagonist suddenly realises just how secluded and limited the land really is. Mary E. Bradley Lane, *Mizora: A Prophecy*, EBook, 2008, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/24750>. Accessed October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

to reality as well as their links to negative downsides of positive proposals.<sup>320</sup> The edge of the map, near which the unknown, unreal, or oscillating is often found,<sup>321</sup> is an aspect discussed below. The edge of a utopian map is a dangerous space, because it is yet another aspect that gives away the utopia as a fiction.<sup>322</sup> In the utopia of Numbers 13, the spies enter the land from outside the boundary of the land, and yet they encounter the monstrous and the fantastic, not so much on the outer edges but within the boundaries of the land. It will be argued that such changes in perspective of what is inside and what is outside are a utopian feature, too, and moreover allow an insight into the multi-layered exploration of self and other in Numbers 13.

For the analysis of biblical mapping in Numbers 13 it is necessary to expand the definition of “map” to include descriptions of the landscape and listing of place-names, not only images of drawn maps like the one found in More’s *Utopia*. Whenever I write “map” it is used as short-hand for the description of a route, landscape, or itinerary, or the listing of a series of toponyms.

#### **4.1.2. The Bible features utopian maps**

Roland Boer draws on aspects of Louis Marin’s work on the difficulties with graphic representation in utopia in his discussion of Chronicles as science fiction and utopia.<sup>323</sup> Discrepancies or tensions can be found in Chronicles when a given description contradicts a description given elsewhere in the Bible. Many descriptions, especially of landscapes and buildings in utopia, are ambiguous and it is impossible to render them graphically.<sup>324</sup> It is not in fact impossible to represent the utopian space graphically; it is impossible to do so without making interpretive decisions that would resolve the ambiguity. However, resolving the

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<sup>320</sup> Below, in chapter 6, I discuss Louis Marin’s idea that utopias play with liminal, neutral spaces.

<sup>321</sup> Some maps, like the Borgia map, found in 1794 in Portugal, mix the known with the unknown or fantastic, and the empirical with the fantastic or transcendental. Both “Paradise” and a land where dragons are drawn on the map are located at the margins of the Borgia map.

<sup>322</sup> “With every map there’s an edge – a border between the known and the unknown.” Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 67.

<sup>323</sup> Boer, *Novel Histories*.

<sup>324</sup> “It seems to me that these critics miss the point, perhaps because they haven’t had the chance to read Louis Marin’s *Utopiques*, for if they had done so, then they would have seen that such a confusion or inability to represent graphically the topographical and geographical description of the utopian space is a characteristic feature of utopian literary production.” *Ibid.*, 145.

ambiguity would subtract a crucial (if not definitive) aspect from the utopia:<sup>325</sup> it would mean to resolve the pun *ou/eu-topia*.

Boer gives examples of difficulties with graphical representation in Chronicles: the measurements of the temple given at 2 Chronicles 3:3-4 are different from the ones given at 1 Kings 6:2-3, and there is downright confusion in 1 Chronicles 11:20-21 on military organisation.<sup>326</sup> The feature of the impossible description in utopian texts will be explored in more detail and illustrated by many examples from utopias below. To foreshadow: the confusion is more fundamental than just being difficult to draw. In some utopian texts we get the impression that it is not only impossible for the reader to draw the description, but that it ought to be impossible for the protagonist to see, explain, and understand everything he or she describes.

John J. Collins cites Jonathan Z. Smith's theory on locative and utopian maps with regard to utopia in the Bible:

In his influential collection of essays, *Map is Not Territory*, Jonathan Smith draws a contrast "between a *locative* vision of the world (which emphasizes place) and a *utopian* vision of the world (using the term in its strict sense: the value of being in no place)." In Smith's terms, locative visions predominate in the biblical literature.<sup>327</sup>

Smith says that the utopian map's features are the representation of a new way of life, a new mode. The utopian map implies renewal and flight. The locative map, on the other hand, emphasises the value of a defined, consistent place, cyclical rather than progressive, and static.<sup>328</sup> I am inclined to read the idea of the Promised Land of the book of Numbers as a utopian map, in Smith's terms, rather than a locative one, although Collins claims that in the Bible the locative map is found more frequently.

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<sup>325</sup> "From the time of its first discovery, the island of King Utopus has been shrouded in ambiguity, and no latter-day scholars should presume to dispel the fog, polluting utopia's natural environment with an excess of clarity and definition. Thomas More himself could not get straight the exact length of the bridge that spanned the River Anydrus at Amaurotum in Utopia." Ibid., 145–146.

<sup>326</sup> "Now Abshai, the brother of Joab, was head of the Three. Wielding his spear against three hundred he killed them, and he had no name among the Three. He was more renowned than the Three among the Two, and he became their commander, but to the Three he did not attain." I have followed the Masoretic text here, since it is quite extraordinary. Any tabular or graphic representation would come to grief in the required complexity of Abshai's presence, absence, naming and renown in and out of the Three (or is it Two?)." Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Collins, "Models of Utopia," 52.

<sup>328</sup> Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 308–309.

The map of Numbers 13 could well be both locative and utopian, which would be consistent with other features that seem dichotomous but stay unresolved in Numbers 13.<sup>329</sup> In Numbers 13, the utopian features of the land include the prospect of radically changing from being a wandering and exiled community, to becoming a society that controls a territory, including fortified cities. As such, the aspiration portrayed might be progressing towards becoming the occupants of the locative map: static territory and occupation of fortified cities, as opposed to camps in the desert or a situation of slavery in Egypt. This static, locative life would be a new mode and a progression for the previously wandering and exiled community, and therefore utopian in Smith's sense. As yet, the community is in a state of constant renewal – this might be what is emphasised by the repetition of the motif of rebellion and return in Numbers – and literally fleeing from oppression and enslavement. In *The Biography of Ancient Israel* Ilana Pardes compares the wilderness stories to adolescence, during which relatively little seems static and one may not yet be aware of cyclical movements, lacking experience.

Ambiguity or dichotomy is found frequently in Numbers, not only with regard to maps, but often with regard to changing locations and wandering. The theme of wandering with the aim of settlement is an ambiguity Smith addresses as well: the nomad can be seen as free and independent and/or as lost and without roots.<sup>330</sup> In Numbers the Israelites could certainly be read as liberated from oppression, therefore free, but also as currently homeless or displaced.

The theme of rebellion and return is ambiguous, too. There seems to be a constant movement between loyalty and obedience on the one hand, and transgression and rebellion on the other. Finally, the interpretation or recapitulation of the wilderness theme in other biblical sources reflects ambiguity. It can be constructed as idealising an innocent past before settlement or as a reminder of a time of disobedience to divine commandments.<sup>331</sup>

In Smith's terms of locative and utopian spaces or maps, which Collins applies to utopian themes in the Bible, the land of Numbers is both locative *and*

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<sup>329</sup> See chapter 6.

<sup>330</sup> Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 130.

<sup>331</sup> On ambiguity of utopia and dystopia in wilderness narratives see e.g. Philip R. Davies, "The Wilderness Years: Utopia and Dystopia in the Book of Hosea.," in *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi (Helsinki; Göttingen: Finnish Exegetical Society; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 160–174.

utopian. The theme of flight, progression and renewal is obvious in Exodus/Numbers. The progression hoped for is towards a more static situation than the current itinerant situation. At the same time, the journey described is a return to the supposedly ancestral homeland, to settle the land and hold fortified cities.

In Numbers 13 specifically the aspect of the ancestral importance of the homeland is implied especially by mentioning Hebron and thereby alluding to the important site of the graves of the fathers. The overall structure is cyclical. Abraham has been to Egypt, too, after all. These features would make the Promised Land as “ancestral homeland” appear locative in Smith’s sense, that is, static and cyclical. At the same time, the hopes of the Israelites are pinned on something new, something that follows upon their liberation, flight, and wandering; an improved and radically altered situation. In this sense the passage is utopian.

Brotsky’s article “The Utopian Map in Ezekiel 48:1-35”<sup>332</sup> is not concerned with theory about mapping and maps in utopia, but rather with the description of the equal distribution that defies physical topography found in Ezekiel, whereas “the allocations in Joshua realistically conform to the topography of the land.”<sup>333</sup> The utopian equal distribution of land, according to Brotsky, symbolises “political stability” and “equality in moral and ritual issues.”<sup>334</sup> This conclusion appears to reflect an underlying implicit definition of utopia as meaning “equality” or “stability”. Utopia has not meant equality since *Animal Farm* and “stability” is reminiscent of the anti-utopians’ dreaded notion of the utopian totalitarian regime. Noteworthy for my argument is Brotsky’s sentence: “However, these boundaries do not match closely any known political or settlement area.”<sup>335</sup> The allocations of territory to each tribe “seem to hover over the land.”<sup>336</sup> Fluid, hovering, and only quasi-realistic boundaries that do not match topography seem to be a description of a utopian space quite in line with Marin, Smith, and Atwood. Such boundaries are an imagined map, only loosely connected to a reality.

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<sup>332</sup> Harold Brotsky, “The Utopian Map in Ezekiel (48:1-34),” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2006): 20–26.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.



Hanna Liss has discussed the utopian “map” found in Ezekiel 40-48. She says that supplying a map makes the idea which the map represents communicable. In her essay this idea is the temple in Ezekiel, in my thesis the idea is the Promised Land. The creation of a map is the creation of a space: “Thus, our text at hand functions as a ‘map’, allowing the ‘house’ to exist outside of a geographically predetermined and permanent place.”<sup>337</sup> Just like the temple of Ezekiel exists independently of empirical geography, I shall argue, the map of the Promised Land of Numbers 13 exists outside of empirical geography.

The boundary descriptions found in Ezekiel have been discussed as being a *Vorlage* for the boundary description of Numbers 34. The toponyms of Numbers 34 coincide with the toponyms of Numbers 13, though they are fewer in Numbers 13. Brodsky is one scholar who reads Ezekiel’s geographies as utopian, which supports my argument that the map of Numbers 13 can be considered to be similarly utopian.

#### **4.1.3. The map of Numbers 13:17-26**

The passage within Numbers 13 I refer to as the “map” is Numbers 13:17-26:<sup>338</sup>

v. 17. And Moses sent them to explore the land of Canaan and he said to them: “Go up here in the *Negeb* and you shall ascend the mountain.

v. 18. And look at the land: what is it [like]? And [look] at the people living in it: are they strong or weak, are they few or many?

v. 19. And what is the land [like] in which [the people] dwell? Is it good or bad? And what are the cities [like] in which they dwell: are they encampments or fortified?

v. 20. And what is the land [like]: is it fat or thin, does it have wood or not, and make an effort and take of the fruit of the land” and the season was the season of the first fruits of the grapes.

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<sup>337</sup> Hanna Liss, “‘Describe the Temple to the House of Israel’: Preliminary Remarks on the Temple Vision in the Book of Ezekiel and the Question of Fictionality in Priestly Literatures,” in *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Diana Edelman (Helsinki; Göttingen: Finnish Exegetical Society; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 136.

<sup>338</sup> My translation. Words that appear to be toponyms in Hebrew are transliterated here according to the SBL’s style sheet in order to stress that they are read as not translatable, and especially not translatable into a modern geography.

v. 21. They went up and explored the country from the desert *Šin* to *Rěḥōb*, *Lěbō*’-*Hāmāt*.

v. 22. They went up in the *Negeb* and he<sup>339</sup> came to *Hebrōn*, and there were *’Āḥîman*, *Šēšay*, and *Talmay*, children of the *’Ānāq* and *Hebrōn* was built seven years before *Šō’an* in Egypt.

v. 23. And they came to the river *’Eškōl*, and they cut down from there a wine branch and one cluster of grapes –they lifted it by bar with two – and of the pomegranates and figs.

v. 24. That place is called “River *’Eškōl*” on account of the cluster that the Israelites cut down there.

v. 25. They returned from the exploration of the land at the end of forty days.

v. 26. They went and they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the assembly of the Israelites in the desert of *Pā’ran* at *Qādēš* and they returned to them word [i.e. they reported] and to the whole assembly and they showed them the fruit of the land.

#### 4.2. *Commentary on Numbers 13:17-26*

In this section, I first summarise commentaries on the structure and contents of the biblical text, especially where it mentions geography or topography, the itinerary, and views of the landscape. This summary foreshadows that some details in this passage are similar to structural features conventionally found in utopias. Then, in the following section (4.3), a detailed utopian reading of the passage engages with Martin Noth’s commentary and points out that the biblical text, especially in conjunction with a reading that clearly shows that it cannot be located in an empirical reality, becomes readable as a utopia.

##### 4.2.1. *Geography and topography (vv. 17.18)*

Noth suggests dividing v. 17 into two parts: 17a – the descriptive part (“And Moses sent them to explore the land of Canaan”), and 17b, Moses’ direct speech (“and he said to them: ‘Go up here in the *Negeb* and you shall ascend the

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<sup>339</sup> The verb form switches from plural to singular here. Rabbinic commentators are interested in this singular verb form. The anonymous layer of the Babylonian Talmud simply states “it should have said ‘they came’” (*b. Sotah 34b*), which prompts the discussion to suggest that only Caleb (hence the singular) left the group and went to Hebron alone to visit the graves of the forefathers (an important association with this place), and thus cannot be held accountable for the plan of the spies to spread slander about the attainability of the land.

mountain.” Etc.). Noth says that there is a discontinuity which shows that an editor has interwoven two different traditions. Noth attributes v. 17a to source P and v. 17b to source J. The first part of the verse speaks of exploring the whole of Canaan, whereas the second part speaks of exploring the Negev and the mountainous region, which is only a part of the land of Canaan:

Mit V. 17b setzt die J-Erzählung ein. Der Bruch zwischen V. 17a und V. 17b zeigt sich darin, daß in V. 17b auf einmal nicht mehr von der Erkundung des (ganzen) “Landes Kanaan” die Rede ist, sondern nur noch vom “Negeb” (d.h. von dem südlich des westjordanischen Gebirges in unbestimmter Ausdehnung sich erstreckenden Wüstengebiet) und von diesem benachbarten “Gebirge”.<sup>340</sup>

In v. 18 Moses’ direct speech is continued. It contains an interesting recurring utopian feature, which is the survey of the land from a high place. The command Moses gives continues with the instruction to see (ראה) the land, it even lists crucial features the spies are to be especially aware of. The spies are to climb a mountain to approach higher ground, to see the land.

#### **4.2.2. The view of the land (vv. 18-20)**

The specific features Moses asks the spies to “see” and report on reflect immediate interests of a community intending to migrate to a territory and to settle there. Some aspects of Moses’ instructions are requests for what might be considered military intelligence, indicating that migration is turning into conquest. The aspect of imminent conquest makes this passage different from most literary utopias, which may mention the aspects of infrastructure and population of the land but never from the point of view of a conqueror. Although some utopian protagonists (the three men from Gilman’s *Herland* and the protagonist of Wells’ “The Country of the Blind”, for example) have initial ideas about subduing the utopian land they have found, feeling superior to its inhabitants, they are never able to follow through with such plans.

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<sup>340</sup> Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose*, 92. “The J-narrative begins at v. 17b. The break between v. 17a and v. 17b is brought out by the fact that in v. 17b there is suddenly no further mention of spying out the (whole) ‘land of Canaan’, but only of the ‘Negeb’ (i.e. the wilderness territory stretching to an unspecified extent to the South of the Palestinian hill country) and of its adjoining ‘hill country’.” Martin Noth, *Numbers*, trans. James D. Martin (SCM Press, 1968), 104.

In Numbers 13:18-20, the land (ארץ) is mentioned three times, twice followed by a question about a specific aspect of the land. Only in v. 18 ארץ is not followed by a specification: “The land – what is it like?” This is an open-ended question. It is followed by the question “And the people living in it: are they strong or weak, are they few or many?” The question about the people(s) living in the land is not open-ended. The respondent can choose from the attributes few, many, strong, or weak.

Verse 19 begins by asking about the land again: “What is the land like, in which the people dwell?” Here, another specification is added: “Is it good or bad?” Milgrom asks in what ways could the land be “good or bad”? Climate? Fertility? He concludes that probably fertility is meant.<sup>341</sup>

The next of Moses’ questions concerns infrastructure: are the cities fortified or are they encampments? This question hints at more than just peaceful settlement and agriculture. Spying out the urban layout of the unknown place carries an implication of a military encounter. It also directly links to the construction of space as either locative or utopian, discussed above. Fortified cities are signs of a static locative space in Smith’s sense. Since the cities are not dominated by the protagonist community, a fundamental change and progression has to occur first, which would seem utopian in Smith’s sense. Numbers 13 contains an ambiguous utopia if we follow Collins and his use of Smith’s distinctions: it is both locative and utopian.

It is often mentioned that utopia as a social thought experiment is often concerned with cities: “The utopia is primarily a vision of the orderly city and of a city-dominated society.”<sup>342</sup> Especially the city of Jerusalem and also the temple as a structure within the city are biblical utopian images. In this sense we can observe that in this particular passage, the ideal is foreshadowed but not yet attained – just like in any utopia the ideal is juxtaposed with a society in which it does not exist.

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<sup>341</sup> Milgrom, *Torah Commentary*, 102.

<sup>342</sup> Frye, “Varieties of Literary Utopias,” 27. In the same volume see also Lewis Mumford, “Utopia, The City and the Machine”. Frye mentions that an idyllic countryside should be called an “arcadia” rather than a utopia with one difference being that an arcadia “puts an emphasis on the integration of man [sic] with his physical environment”, whereas a utopia often refers to human dominance over nature (p. 41). Lyman Tower Sargent’s aforementioned categorisation of utopias into subgenres includes the subgenre of “arcadia” as well.

In v. 20 the land is mentioned again: is it fat or thin? That is, is it fertile or not fertile? If we agreed with Milgrom that the earlier question about whether the land is good or bad refers to fertility, this would be a repetition of the question about the land's fertility. It is possible that the "good or bad" from v. 19 refers to "good or bad" in a sense different from fertility, or perhaps it stresses that the land's fertility is indeed the most important factor that is worth asking about twice. The cluster of grapes the spies cut down (v. 23) would testify to the fertility of the land. A possible family resemblance recognisable to a post-medieval reader would be the abundance of food known from the satirical *The Land of Cockayne* (which is also a subgenre of utopia according to Lyman Tower Sargent).

Numbers 13:20 asks about wood (עץ). One could choose to translate "tree". Whether "tree" or "wood" is meant, neither is unimportant to settlement, agriculture, and a military campaign. Since the final request is to bring back a sample of the fruit found in the land, the word could indicate fruit trees.<sup>343</sup> However, since the trees here are not specified, they can be understood both as a military asset and as an agricultural asset. In the instructions on how to conduct the conquest of the land of Canaan found in the book of Deuteronomy, there is included a differentiation particularly between trees that provide food and trees that may be cut down to construct barricades and siege works (Deut 20:19-20).<sup>344</sup> The mention of the trees that are not further specified shows a certain oscillation between the passage as a conquest narrative, and the passage as containing traits of an agrarian utopia.

#### **4.2.3. The route (vv.21-24)**

Tracing geographically the route the spies take is made difficult by our inability to state with certainty where the places mentioned in the text were (or are).

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<sup>343</sup> As in Moses Mendelssohn's translation, who translates עץ with "Fruchtbäume" ("Fruit trees"). Annette Böckler, ed., *Die Tora: Die fünf Bücher Mose in der Übersetzung von Moses Mendelssohn. Mit den Prophetenlesungen im Anhang*, trans. Moses Mendelssohn (Berlin: Jüdische Verlagsanstalt, 2001).

<sup>344</sup> Jacob Wright has explored the theme of "scorched earth" warfare from a historical perspective, considering whether the laws of Deuteronomy proscribing behaviour in a conquest or war situation, are a polemic against Neo-Assyrian warfare practices. On the importance of fruit trees in siege warfare, see especially pp. 434 – 435. Jacob Wright, "Warfare and Wanton Destruction: A Reexamination of Deuteronomy 20:19-20 in Relation to Ancient Siegecraft," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 3 (September 15, 2008): 423–458.

Rashi, whether for illustrative or symbolic purposes, describes the route as looking like an upper case gamma (Γ).<sup>345</sup> This particular itinerary of Numbers does not receive as much speculation and discussion by modern biblical scholars as the itinerary of the Exodus in general. This exploratory mission's itinerary does not seem to be counted among the larger route of Exodus-Numbers.<sup>346</sup>

Martin Noth suggests attributing vv. 21 and 22 to different sources in order to account for the inconsistencies in the description of the route. He links v. 21 with the first part of v. 17 (referring to the whole land of Canaan) and vv. 22-24 with the second part of v. 17:

Die Ausführung des Auftrags wird doppelt berichtet, einmal in der kurzen Feststellung von V. 21, die sich nach Formulierung und Inhalt als unmittelbare Fortsetzung von V. 17a (P) erweist, und sodann in der längeren Ausführung von V. 22-24, die ebenso deutlich sich unmittelbar an V. 17b-20 (J) anschließt.<sup>347</sup>

Jacob Milgrom agrees that these two verses show the merging of two traditions. One tradition refers to a journey covering the entire land (v. 21) the other tradition, to a journey only to Hebron (v. 22).<sup>348</sup>

However, a reader encounters the text as a whole. A reader who is aware of the documentary hypothesis has knowledge of this hypothesis at her or his disposal to make sense of textual discrepancies. Other readers may encounter the text from a different point of view, they may, for example, regard the biblical text as originally authored by God, which has an impact on which interpretations of the texts are available to such readers.<sup>349</sup> Biblical scholars, or

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<sup>345</sup> Rashi on Num 13:21. See Rashi and Yisrael Isser Zvi Herczeg, *The Torah, with Rashi's Commentary: Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated by Y.I.Z. Herczeg*, 4th ed. (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1994).

<sup>346</sup> It is not mentioned in James Karl Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). It is not mentioned in G.I. Davies, "The Wilderness Itineraries and the Composition of the Pentateuch," *Vetus Testamentum* 33, no. 1 (1983): 1–13. It is not mentioned in G.I. Davies, "The Wilderness Itineraries: A Comparative Study," *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974): 46–81. It is not mentioned in G.W. Coats, "The Wilderness Itinerary," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1972): 135–152.

<sup>347</sup> Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose*, 93. "The carrying out of this task is reported twice, once in the brief assertion of v. 21 which proves, from both wording and content, to be a direct continuation of v. 17aP, and then in the longer exposition of vv. 22-24 which just as clearly connects directly with vv. 17b-20J." Noth, *Numbers*, 104–105.

<sup>348</sup> Milgrom, *Torah Commentary*, 102.

<sup>349</sup> For example, Boone speaks about the Christian fundamentalist perspective of the Bible as an inerrant text, authored by God. "The logic of biblical inerrancy is palpable. If God is omniscient, and if he is the author of the scriptural text, it follows that the text cannot contain mistakes,

certain European theologians, might be likely to explain such apparent inconsistencies by relying on Noth or Wellhausen. I will show later how a Puritan reader must find a certain approach to the dichotomies and inconsistencies of the text, if it is to become a heuristic device similar to a call-to-action utopia, and applied to reality.

Along with most terminology, I see the audience or the reader as ideal typical, not homogeneous. No one reading has more authority than another: the scholarly reading by Noth is not more valid or valuable than the reading by Bradford or the reading of the text as utopia or science fiction. All these readings can legitimately exist, are derived from methods current at certain times, and cater to specific purposes and audiences. The precariousness or even danger of a text lies in the possibility of any of these readings becoming authoritative and from there abused as a means to ostracise, silence, or ridicule other readings.<sup>350</sup>

#### 4.2.4. Returning elsewhere? (vv.25.26)

Numbers 12:16 mentions that the Israelites are encamped in the wilderness of Paran. Paran is also where they are said to return to in v. 26. However, there is an insertion or specification found in v. 26: The spies return to “Kadesh, in the wilderness of Paran”. Noth sees “to Kadesh” (קדשה) as an insertion, finding an inconsistency between v.3 and v. 26:

Von dieser Bemerkung ist nur ein Wort redaktionell in den P-Text eingeschaltet worden, weil es sachlich wichtig erschien, nämlich die Ortsangabe “nach Kades” in V. 26, die sich nunmehr sachlich und formal mit der unmittelbar vorangehenden Angabe “in die Pharan-Wüste” stößt.<sup>351</sup>

It remains unclear why one word that allegedly clashes in “form and content”, yet at the same time seemed “factually significant” would be inserted. I

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whether in content or form. If it should be found to contain errors, through some indiscernible will of its author, it remains problematic that an omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good being should be content to allow errors to have come into existence in his written work.” Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 25.

<sup>350</sup> Reminiscent of course once again of Donna Haraway’s critique of the enmities between several different orientations of feminism, already cited above. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” 150.

<sup>351</sup> Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose*, 94. “Of this report only one word has been inserted by an editor into the P-text because it appeared factually significant, namely the place name ‘at Kadesh’ in v. 26 which, from the point of view of both form and content, clashes with the immediately preceding statement ‘in the wilderness of Paran’.” Noth, *Numbers*, 106.

am now going to resolve this seeming inconsistency by discussing it not as something in need of reconciliation or explanation, but as an expected feature of a description of a fictional geography.

#### **4.3. *Features of literary utopias and the route of Numbers 13: difficulties of representation and the telescope effect***

##### **4.3.1. Utopian feature one: the route is not representable**

Reading from the point of view of utopian theory, the exact locations of the route are not as important as the fact that a map is sketched out. Such “mapping” even of a fictional place is a recurring motif in utopian literature.<sup>352</sup> Frequently, maps of utopia cannot easily be represented graphically,<sup>353</sup> adding evidence that the place described is in fact a fiction or at least not well-known, as mentioned above. If a place is in fact unknown, it may be even more likely that a narrative includes a sketch of a map, to serve as an orientation mark both for the reader and the writer.<sup>354</sup>

In most commentaries on Numbers 13, there are hints that the topography is not easily representable. Noth and Milgrom solve the incoherence by attributing each contradicting passage to a different source. The route, the descriptions, and the maps have not gone unnoticed by earlier Jewish commentators either. Rashi attempts to represent the route graphically. To him, it looks like the Greek letter Gamma. Rashi does not give any details as to what exactly the significance of this might be. It is interesting to note that Rashi’s hermeneutic operation here is abstracting the route. It is no longer just a list of place names, but it is transferred into a visual and anachronistic realm: the route looking like the letter Gamma might be something that would help a reader who can read Greek to make some sense of the route. Rashi does not historicise and he does not argue

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<sup>352</sup> Schweitzer, *Reading Utopia in Chronicles*, 22.

<sup>353</sup> “Utopia is not a topography but a topic.” Marin, *Utopics*, 115. Boer has applied Marin’s theories on the cartographical impossibilities of utopia to *Chronicles* in Boer, *Novel Histories*, 144–147. Suvin observes this phenomenon, as well: the location of a utopia only appear to be spatial, “[...] it abounds in maps, but it is not photographable.” Suvin, “Theses on Dystopia 2001,” 190.

<sup>354</sup> “Indeed it would seem that quite a few writers think cartographically, especially writers about imaginary places. If you’re writing about a real city, a well-known one, the maps of it already exist and the reader can look them up, but if you’re writing about an unknown location, they don’t.” Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 67.



anachronistically that the spies purposefully followed a route that would look like a Greek letter when transferred onto a piece of paper.

As the text comes down to us, we are not able to represent it graphically without adding our own point of view. In order to draw an unambiguous line or map decisions have to be made, such as the precise location of the starting point. If a map is included to enable one story out of all possible stories, then drawing biblical maps makes the biblical story one concrete possibility out of its many theoretical possibilities. A map is one interpretation, endorsing one story. In the utopia this story might be an author's extrapolation of certain aspects of her or his perceived reality.

In biblical studies the map will be the story a particular biblical scholar will want to read into (not so much out of; the only map to be read out of the text is the utopian one) the biblical text, possibly to meet an audience's need for precise meaning and the peaceful resolution of all ambiguities. This is one more discontinuity between reading the Bible as utopia and reading most literary utopias. Of course there are maps included in utopian texts, for instance the wood cut by Holbein to illustrate More's *Utopia*. Such maps are artistic reactions to popular utopian texts and do not attempt to locate the utopian geography in reality.

In the following paragraphs I shall compile evidence that the places of Numbers 13 cannot be located on a map; they are not graphically representable. The evidence comes from scholars (primarily from Martin Noth) who attribute a realistic dimension to the story of Numbers 13, and who thus seem to be generally open to the thought that the places mentioned there exist or existed in contemporary and/or historical reality. Often scholars do not attribute major significance to the impossibility of locating these places. However, as I hope to show in chapters 4 and 5, misunderstanding the impossible place as a real place – misunderstanding the heuristic utopia as a realistic account of historical reality – can have an impact on a group's behaviour in a contact or conquest situation.

#### **4.3.1.1.      *Paran or Kadesh***

Martin Noth cannot determine with certainty any of the places mentioned in Numbers 13, except Hebron, but Hebron is as elusive a place reference as the others, as I shall argue later on. The survey of Noth's statements about the place

names originated in my attempt to draw the map of Numbers 13 in order to test Marin's hypothesis about graphically non-representable maps in utopia, and to verify whether the map of Numbers 13 was indeed not graphically representable, thereby adding a significant utopian feature. If one were to start drawing, one might begin with the starting point, according to Numbers 13:3 the wilderness of Paran.

Dieser [Ausgangspunkt] lag nach P in der fernen und wahrscheinlich nur vage lokalisierten "Pharan-Wüste" (13,3); nach J befand sich Israel damals in Kades (13,26), das schon zum äußersten (südlichen) Horizont des Westjordanlandes zu rechnen ist.<sup>355</sup>

In an attempted drawing with the help of Noth, one would first have to decide in favour of J or P, which already makes the starting point ambiguous. Reading carefully, neither place seems to be unambiguously locatable: P's starting point according to Noth is the wilderness of Paran, which is "wahrscheinlich nur vage lokalisiert". J gives a different starting point, Kadesh.

Both Noth's term "Westjordanland" to help locate Kadesh, and James D. Martin's English translation as "Palestine" are difficult. While "Westjordanland" could be a neutral geographical location, simply meaning "west of the river Jordan", it is more immediately associated with the modern day territory known as the West Bank. Whether Noth meant to associate the West Bank territory or not, it immediately evokes this association in a contemporary reader, and it becomes unclear whether Noth is attempting to place the spying episode on a contemporary map. The English translation gives "Palestine", where "West Bank" would be a more appropriate translation of Noth's term. Again, it is unclear what exactly is meant by Palestine. At the time of the translation (1968), the state of Israel already existed, so the term "Palestine" might evoke an idea of the region before the state of Israel was established, or it might be referring to some other past entity anachronistically called "Palestine". The terminology both in German and in its translation shows clearly just how many contemporary and historical issues there are in mapping and naming territory, especially when

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<sup>355</sup> Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose*, 91. "According to P this [the starting point of the spies] lay in the distant and presumably only vaguely located 'wilderness of Paran' (13:3); according to J, Israel was at that time in Kadesh (13:26), which is to be reckoned as on the southernmost frontier of Palestine." Noth, *Numbers*, 102–103.

seen in diachronic perspective and if we add the level of changing terminology and associations.

The idea that the starting point is ambiguous is also supported by Levine, who struggles with the same issues as Noth. He writes: “Such a route was realistic, considering the location of the Israelite base at the time, in Kadesh.”<sup>356</sup> In another statement however, Levine reveals an important aspect of mapping and naming places. Levine describes Kadesh as one group’s interpretation of a place: “It is this verse that identifies the place from which the spies were dispatched as Kadesh. In the priestly perception, Kadesh was located in the Wilderness of Paran.”<sup>357</sup> Levine’s choice of words here – “priestly perception” – indicates, maybe not even explicitly, that mapping, placing, and naming depend on who maps, places, and names. It would seem as though Levine’s statement could be amended like this: “In the priestly perception, Kadesh was located in the Wilderness of Paran; in the perception of another group, it was located elsewhere entirely.”

#### 4.3.1.2. *Šin and Rēḥōb, Lēbō’-Ḥāmāt*

The next place to be determined on the route is the distance between the wilderness of *Šin* to *Rēḥōb, Lēbō’-Ḥāmāt* (Num 13:21). Noth writes:

In V. 21 wird das “Land Kanaan” (V. 2a. 17a) in seiner Süd-Nord-Erstreckung durch zwei Lokalangaben bestimmt, deren Deutung im Sinne des Verfassers schwierig ist. Die “Zin-Wüste”, nach Jos. 15, 3-4. Mos. 34, 4 östlich der Oase von Kades-Barnea zu suchen [...].<sup>358</sup>

The two place names, whose interpretation in the “sense of the author” is difficult, are *Šin* and *Rēḥōb, Lēbō’-Ḥāmāt*.

*Šin* is linked by Noth to passages in Joshua and Numbers 34. Below, I follow Nadav Na’aman in the assumption that the locations of Numbers 34 might be modelled on locations found in the book of Ezekiel, often called

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<sup>356</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 347.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>358</sup> Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose*, 93. “In v. 21 the ‘land of Canaan’ (vv. 2a, 17a) from south to north is particularized by the mention of two place-names, the significance given to which by the author is difficult to determine. The ‘wilderness of Zin’ is to be sought according to Josh 15.3 = Num 34.4. to the east of the oasis of Kadesh-Barnea [...]” Noth, *Numbers*, 104. The English translation of the phrase “the significance given to which by the author” does not accurately reflect the German. More accurately, the German should be translated as “the interpretation [of the two place-names] according to how the author would have understood them, is difficult”.

utopian by scholars, and that the compiler of Numbers 34 may not have known the locations he was mentioning.

*Rēḥōb* and *Lēbō'-Ḥāmāt* receive the following comments from Noth:

Der nördliche Horizont wird mit dem Ausdruck *rḥb lbw' hmt* bestimmt. Dabei dürfte *lbw' hmt*, was auch immer die ursprüngliche Bedeutung dieses Ausdrucks gewesen sein mag, von P im Sinne von “am Eingang nach Hamath” verstanden worden und damit die große Niederung zwischen Libanon und Antilibanon (*biḳā'*) gemeint sein, durch die ein wichtiger Zugang zu der Stadt “Hamath” (*ḥama* am Orontes) führte. Diese Angabe dient zur Lokalisierung von *rḥb*, das doch wohl als Ortsname (“Rehob”) verstanden sein will. Dieses “Rehob” kann nicht sicher mit einem der sonst aus dem Alten Testament bekannten Orte dieses Namens identifiziert werden, allenfalls mit dem seinerseits schwer deutbaren “Beth-Rehob” von Ri. 18, 28, falls dieses in der Gegend der Jordanquellen und damit des Südausgangs der *biḳā'* zu suchen ist.<sup>359</sup>

Going through this long citation carefully, we can see once again, that a certain understanding of what a possible toponym (Rehob “[will] doch wohl als Ortsname verstanden [sein]”) may have meant to an elusive community of text creators, P, is proposed. The original meaning of the expression seems to be lost or not of interest here. Noth assumes that the Hebrew letters *rḥb* refer to a place. Obviously establishing that something *is* a toponym in the first place is crucial to attempting to locate it, but this fails: *Rēḥōb* cannot be identified with other places known as *Rēḥōb* from the Hebrew Bible, at best with another place-name mentioned in the book of Judges, however, this place itself is “difficult to locate”. These places are located in a general northern direction by Noth, but they are not precise enough to even draw a relative map, based only on the toponyms of Numbers 13.

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<sup>359</sup> Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose*, 93. “The northern frontier is described by the expression *rḥb lbw' hmt*. Whatever the original meaning of this expression may have been, *lbw' hmt* must have been understood by P as meaning ‘at the entrance of Hamath’ and by this the great depression between Lebanon and Antilebanon (*beqā'*) must have been meant, through which lay an important point of access to the town ‘Hamath’ (*ḥama* on the Orontes). This assertion helps to locate *rḥb*, which is certainly meant to be taken as a place-name (‘Rehob’). This Rehob cannot, with any certainty, be identified with the place of the same name known elsewhere in the Old Testament, but it can with the ‘Beth-rehob’ of Judg. 18:28 which, for its part, is difficult to locate, supposing that the latter is to be sought in the region of the source of the Jordan [...]” Noth, *Numbers*, 104–105. Again, there is a point of criticism to be brought forward of the English translation. Noth does not say that Rehob can be identified with Beth-Rehob, which the English seems to imply. In the German, “allenfalls” implies a much more cautious approach to identifying Rehob with Beth-Rehob, than the English translation conveys. I would translate Noth’s “allenfalls” as “at best” or, more freely, “if it is really necessary”.

Levine supplies an additional perspective on what may happen to elusive places if great importance is attributed to them in culturally significant stories. “Rehob may be the name of either a district of a city, perhaps Bet Rehob (Judg. 18:28) [...] It became virtually proverbial as a faraway place in the north of the land [...]”.<sup>360</sup> Following Noth we understand that *Rēḥōb* is “certainly meant to be taken as a place-name”. Now, according to Levine, this city has become proverbial, presumably already in biblical times. A city becoming a symbol, proverbial, has interesting implications for its link to an empirical reality. The link has become theoretical, abstract, and tenuous.

#### 4.3.1.3. *Negeb*

The two toponyms of v. 22 are *Negeb* and *Hebrōn*. Discussing a break between P and J between vv. 17a and 17b, Noth explains the territory called *Negeb* in the following way:

Der Bruch zwischen V. 17a und V. 17b zeigt sich darin, daß in V. 17b auf einmal nicht mehr von der Erkundung des (ganzen) “Landes Kanaan” die Rede ist, sondern nur noch vom “Negeb” (d.h. von dem südlich des westjordanischen Gebirges in unbestimmter Ausdehnung sich erstreckenden Wüstengebiet) und von diesem benachbarten “Gebirge”.<sup>361</sup>

Apart from the perimeter confusion between J and P, if one reads between the lines, or more precisely within Noth’s parentheses, the *Negeb* is yet another space which is “unspecified”: “unbestimmt”. The territory “[erstreckt sich] in unbestimmter Ausdehnung” south of the neighbouring mountains. It was already pointed out that there is a certain semantic vagueness in Noth’s use of the term “Westjordanland” and Martin’s translation of the term as “Palestine”. Here yet another unspecified territory is added to the already vague topography.

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<sup>360</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 355.

<sup>361</sup> Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose*, 92. “The break between v. 17a and v. 17b is brought out by the fact that in v. 17b there is suddenly no further mention of spying out the (whole) ‘land of Canaan’, but only of the ‘Negeb’ (i.e. the wilderness territory stretching to an unspecified extent to the South of the Palestinian hill country) and of its adjoining ‘hill country’.” Noth, *Numbers*, 104.

#### 4.3.1.4. *Hebrôn*

The next problematic place name of Numbers 13 is *Hebrôn*. Levine comments, “Ancient Hebron has been identified as Tell Rumeidah, where limited excavations have been undertaken recently.”<sup>362</sup> It is not clear why undertaking excavations helps to precisely identify the location of ancient *Hebrôn* or proves anything other than the former presence of a settlement.

Milgrom makes no apparent differentiation between ancient Hebron and modern-day Hebron. He speaks of the ascent of the spies in Numbers 13 as follows: “The ascent begins in the Negeb and reaches an altitude of 900 meters (3,000 ft) at Hebron (v. 22).”<sup>363</sup> I assume that the altitude given is the altitude of contemporary Hebron, which would state quite clearly, though implicitly, that Milgrom identifies the literary *Hebrôn* of Numbers 13 with contemporary Hebron. Levine points out that there may be an ancient Hebron, possibly different from modern-day Hebron.

Stavarakopoulou deals with the confusion surrounding the location and the naming of *Hebrôn*, but she does not try to locate it herself. The confusion about *Hebrôn* can be explained by the existence of different names which refer to the same co-ordinates, which indicates that the place is significant and contested.<sup>364</sup> *Hebrôn* is associated with an ancestral burial ground.

Stavarakopoulou gives a list of biblical passages in which a location – Mahpelah – is supposedly specified, when discussing confusion around the designations Mamre, Hebron, and Kiriath-Arba.<sup>365</sup> Two explanations for the confusion are offered: one is that different groups, who named the same place differently, competed for the place (and the burial ground); the other is that different places competed over the honour of being Mahpelah:

It is difficult to assess whether, or the extent to which, the toponymic competition over Abraham’s burial ground reflects disputes between different groups, each claiming Abraham as their local ancestor, or is

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<sup>362</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 354.

<sup>363</sup> Milgrom, *Torah Commentary*, 102.

<sup>364</sup> “Throughout Genesis, all these toponyms crowd the ancestral burial site, jostling for recognition. Though it is often assumed that these were all essentially the same place, the aligning, glossing or renaming of locations is frequently suggestive of changing or competing claims to ownership.” Francesca Stavarakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims* (London: T&T Clark International, 2012), 52.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

more suggestive of rivalry between multiple sites, each competing for identification with Mahpelah.<sup>366</sup>

In a footnote, she demonstrates how unreliable biblical toponyms are and at what a loss one might be if asked to draw places on an unambiguous map, the seemingly familiar biblical *Hebrôn* as well as the absolutely elusive wadi *`Eškōl*:

Mahpelah is closely associated with Mamre in Gen 13:17, 19; 25:9; 49:30; 50:13, which in its turn is identified with Hebron in Gen 13:18; 23:19; 35:27. Kiriath-arba is identified with Hebron in Gen 23:2; 35:27; Josh 14:15; 15:13, 54; 20:7; 21:11; Judg 1:10 and with Mamre in Gen 35:27. The tomb site is identified with Hebron in Gen 23:19 and aligned with Kiriath-arba and Hebron 23:2.<sup>367</sup>

Once more, no conclusion is possible from the biblical text alone as to what or where a place is. A possible conclusion is that the confusion – be it there because of rivalry between groups, rivalry between places, or because of the intervention of an editor – can be read as a utopian map. The utopian map gives details of a landscape that aim to generate a realistic effect, but at the same time the map demonstrates to the careful reader that the places cannot be located in empirical reality. They are imaginary places, loaded with abstract and symbolic potential, of which the map enables one possibility to be expounded further, as a story.

#### 4.3.1.5. *`Eškōl*

The next toponym is wadi *`Eškōl* in Numbers 13:23. This toponym is intriguing because commentators most easily admit that it is impossible to locate, yet it is a toponym “native” to Numbers 13: this fictional place is “named and claimed” in the story. It is, in the text of Numbers 13, brought into named existence from a previous nameless non-existence. Noth writes:

Die ausgesandten Männer begaben sich nun freilich nicht in die “uralte” Stadt mit den schrecklichen “Halsketten-Sprößlingen”, sondern in das in ihrer Umgebung zu suchende “Eskol-Tal” (V. 23.24), das nicht mehr sicher zu lokalisieren ist, weil sein Name sich an Ort und Stelle nicht

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 51.

mehr erhalten zu haben scheint, was um so begreiflicher ist, als dieser Name appellativ einfach “Trauben-Tal” bedeutet.<sup>368</sup>

It is not quite understandable why it would be more likely for a place not to retain a name if the name is descriptive, “appellativ”. The interesting coincidence that can be pointed out is that the biblical text interjects that “That place was named the wadi Eshcol because of the cluster the Israelites cut down there” (Num 13:24). The text claims that the place was named after the event of the harvest of the grape cluster. Either the place name is lost (it is mentioned in the Bible only in the retellings of this episode in Num 32:9 and Deut 1:24), or the episode is a fiction that was never transferred into reality enough for anyone to actually attempt to find a wadi *ʿEškōl* in reality.

Similar to Noth, Levine writes: “Wadi Eshcol has not been precisely identified.”<sup>369</sup> Here, obviously his use of the present perfect, “has not been identified”, would seem to imply hope that it will be identified, as if the endeavour of identifying the place continues in the present and on into the future.

A more worthwhile reading of this episode comes from Ilana Pardes, who convincingly compares the passage to tropes often found in conquest literature: “Naming is a mode of discursive appropriation that is an integral part of every conquest.”<sup>370</sup> Attempting to make the case that the place should be or could be located in empirical reality is a precarious operation when we take into account the critical work postcolonial studies contributes. Masalha writes, “Ben Gurion had visited the Negev [...] and been struck by the fact that no Hebrew names existed for geographical sites in the region.”<sup>371</sup> A “governmental names committee”, using the Bible as a resource, assigned Hebrew names to places in

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<sup>368</sup> Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose*, 94. “The men who were sent out certainly did not enter the ‘ancient’ town [Hebron] with its terrible ‘necklace descendants’, [Anakites] but confined themselves to the ‘Valley of Eshcol’ (vv.23-24), which is to be sought in the neighbourhood of Hebron, but cannot be located any more precisely, since its name seems to have been retained by no place at all, a fact that is all the more understandable since it is merely descriptive, with the meaning of ‘valley of clusters’.” Noth, *Numbers*, 105–106.

<sup>369</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 355.

<sup>370</sup> Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel*, 120.

<sup>371</sup> Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism*, 67–68.



the Negev, “mountains, valleys, waterholes, springs”,<sup>372</sup> to prevent future claims.

Pardes implies that the naming of the place Gilgal by Joshua when crossing the Jordan (Josh 5:9) attempts to craft a connection to the past, while erasing the current name of the place:

To be sure, Canaanite history is indeed effaced, much as Native American names were wiped off the map, but at the same time older names, or names that are construed as old, are retrieved. What the returning Israelites wish to do is to add new sites to the old map of the patriarchs.<sup>373</sup>

The utopian reading is more closely related to postcolonial readings than to readings such as the one by Noth. The connections explored in such a reading, like in a postcolonial reading, are not about the text’s relationship with a supposed past or current geographical reality. It is concerned with the fiction of claimed or re-appropriated geographies and the relationship between these fictions and those who use it – Ben Gurion, William Bradford, any interpreter. A utopian geography is juxtaposed with the utopian author’s reality. Those who name and claim a place are attempting to put into reality the first step of a realised utopia.

#### **4.3.2. Utopian feature two: the telescope effect**

At the beginning of the spying mission stands Moses’ command to enter the land through the Negev and ascend the mountain(s). Modern commentators focus on various aspects of how this supposedly physical journey should have taken place: the spies are to ascend in, via, or from the Negev, from their supposed camping place in the wilderness of Zin and then reconnoitre what the JPS translation calls “the hill country”. The Hebrew phrase is

עָלוּ זֶה בְּנֶגֶב וְעֲלִיתֶם אֶת-הָהָר.

Levine comments that the verb form *’lh* (עלה) does not necessarily mean an ascent, but rather a movement into a northern direction. He reads the singular form “mountain” as a collective form meaning mountain range.<sup>374</sup> Milgrom

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel*, 121.

<sup>374</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 353.

argues that the demonstrative *zeh* (זֶה) is to be understood as meaning that the spies are to reach the mountain range *via* the Negev. Milgrom reads the ascent literally: “The ascent begins in the Negeb and reaches an altitude of 900 meters (3,000 ft) at Hebron (v. 22).”<sup>375</sup>

Noth points out supposed discrepancies in v. 17 and implies that the demonstrative *zeh* (זֶה) is taken to mean that the Israelites are already in the Negev, that is, that it refers to their starting point:

Israel befand sich bereits “hier im Negeb”, und das zu erkundende Gebiet war, wie aus V. 22-24 hervorgeht, das (süd)judäische “Gebirge” bis in die Gegend von Hebron.<sup>376</sup>

All of the above comments take the journey proposed in Moses’ direct speech more or less literally. In a utopian reading, trying to make sense of exact topography or movement is superfluous, just like drawing the route might be impossible, because the initial survey is another common feature at the outset of the exploration of the utopian space. Like the utopian map, the initial survey can appear distorted if one were to see it as real.

The scouts are to ascend a mountain and “see the land”. In this passage of direct speech, Moses is giving them their itinerary:

v. 17. And Moses sent them to explore the land of Canaan and he said to them: “Go up here in the *Negeb* and you shall ascend the mountain.

v. 18. And look at the land: what is it [like]? And [look] at the people living in it: is it strong or weak, is it few or many?

v. 19. And what is the land [like] in which it [the people] dwells? Is it good or bad? And what are the cities [like] in which they dwell: are they encampments or fortified?

v. 20. And what is the land [like]: is it fat or thin [i.e. fertile or not], does it have wood or not [...].”

The scouts are being sent to scout the land, not just to look down upon it from a mountain, but the initial survey from a high place that can cue the

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<sup>375</sup> Milgrom, *Torah Commentary*, 102.

<sup>376</sup> Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose*, 93. “Israel was already ‘here in the Negeb’ and the territory to be reconnoitred was, as is clear from vv. 22-24, the (south) Judaeon ‘hill country’ as far as the Hebron region.” Noth, *Numbers*, 104.

description of an unrealistically detailed view is a stock feature of many literary utopias.

Many utopias begin with a description of the general – what I have called “the map” above – and then go into some detail about what landscape and towns look like. Frequently the initial survey found in utopias appears to include more information than a protagonist could realistically gather from his or her vantage point. I am going to call this the “telescope effect”.

Sometimes the initial survey or the first impression of the land requires a mobile protagonist. The views seen by the protagonist have to be explained. Often discrepancies appear in the description of such views when a character sees or knows more than they realistically could. The sweeping initial view, though meant to depict a realistic image of the fictional place, in fact underlines that it is invented and not actually seen by the author. The exaggerated survey sets up the story for subsequent discoveries by the protagonist.

There are different strategies by which the utopian narrator is made plausibly omniscient with regard to the as yet empty country, its infrastructure, and to some extent its economic structures. Sometimes the narrator is elevated and looks down upon the land from a mountain or from a plane. A moving narrator might walk around the found place. Finally, the narrator might interview a local resident to attain information about the utopia. In these early descriptions, often found in the expository chapters of a utopia, the land still seems empty, because its inhabitants are only encountered later in the story. In *Numbers 13* the presence of inhabitants is foreshadowed in the initial exposition about what to look out for in the land. An encounter with inhabitants is implicitly foreshadowed whenever the initial survey mentions buildings and towns.

#### **4.3.2.1. Elevated narrators see more than they should**

In Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon*, the protagonist describes a view, which seems to include more than what one could realistically see from any one vantage point.

But what I saw! It was such an expanse as was revealed to Moses when he stood upon the summit of Mount Sinai, and beheld that promised land which it was not to be his to enter. The beautiful sunset sky was crimson and gold; blue, silver, and purple; exquisite and tranquillising; fading away therein were plains, on which I could see many a town and city, with buildings that had lofty steeples and rounded domes. Nearer

beneath me lay ridge behind ridge, outline behind outline, sunlight behind shadow, and shadow behind sunlight, gully and serrated ravine. I saw large pine forests, and the glitter of a noble river winding its way upon the plains; also many villages and hamlets, some of them quite near at hand; and it was on these that I pondered most.<sup>377</sup>

The first chapters of *Erewhon* describe how the protagonist gains height by climbing a mountain range to see what lies beyond it. The view seems to include impossibly many sights: towns, villages, *and* hamlets. The towns are close enough for the protagonist to see architectural details such as steeples and domes, yet the hamlets were “near at hand” and “nearer beneath me lay ridge behind ridge, outline behind outline”. How near could a hamlet be, when ridges and outlines are closest to the narrator, and the architectural details of a town would still be visible? Landscape features include plains, forests, ravines (plurals), *and* a river. What the narrator sees is a whole country, not just one city or the country’s countryside. In one sweeping glance, he seems to catch a first glimpse of civic organisation, topography, and infrastructure.

In Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s utopia *Herland* the amount of visual information gathered from the first telescoped overview is enabled because the protagonists are equipped with a small airplane and binoculars.

So we sailed low, crossing back and forth, quartering the country as we went, and studying it. We saw – I can’t remember now how much of this we noted then and how much was supplemented by our later knowledge, but we could not help seeing this much, even on that excited day – a land in a state of perfect cultivation, where even the forests looked as if they were cared for; a land that looked like an enormous park, only it was even more evidently an enormous garden [...]. I confess that we paid small attention to the clean, well-built roads, to the attractive architecture, to the ordered beauty of the little town. We had our glasses out; even Terry, setting his machine for a spiral glide, clapped the binoculars to his eyes.<sup>378</sup>

In this passage, too, countryside and urban views are described from above, with some reference to the fact that it does seem like a lot of information to take in on one flight: the narrator admits that possibly the memory of the first view

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<sup>377</sup> Butler, *Erewhon*. Accessed April 16th, 2012.

<sup>378</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998), 9–10.

might be supplemented by what the protagonists learn later. A zooming effect is achieved by mentioning the use of binoculars.<sup>379</sup>

#### 4.3.2.2. Utopian narrators on the move

Thomas More's *Utopia* gives an initial survey when in Book One Raphael's journey to Utopia is described. Here, the protagonist travels through different landscapes to achieve the effect of a survey.

Thus after many days' journey, he said, they found towns and cities and weal-publics, full of people, governed by good and wholesome laws. "For under the line equinoctial, and on both sides of the same, as far as the sun doth extend his course, lieth", quoth he, "great and wide deserts and wildernesses, parches, burned, and dried up with continual and intolerable heat. All things be hideous, terrible, loathsome, and unpleasant to behold; all things out of fashion and comliness, inhabited with wild beasts and serpents, or at the least wise with people that be no less savage, wild and noisome than the very beasts themselves be. But a little farther beyond that, all things begin by little and little to wax pleasant: the air soft, temperate, and gentle; the ground covered with green grass; less wilderness in the beasts. At the last shall ye come again to people, cities, and towns wherein is continual intercourse and occupying of merchandise and chaffare, not only among themselves and with their borderers, but also with merchants of far countries, both by land and water."<sup>380</sup>

Here, again, landscape, cityscape and infrastructure, even economic structures are mentioned. The telescoping effect distinctly emphasises that just about everything is more pleasant in the approach to Utopia than in other places. Book Two of Thomas More's *Utopia* has a rather reduced first person narrator and the approach to the description of the Utopian society is encyclopaedic, that is, everything that can be said about a particular topic is narrated in one subsection. Other utopias, like Samuel Butler's piece, narrate a sequence of events that "happen" to the protagonist, thus explaining how they arrived at the knowledge, rather than just stating what they know.

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<sup>379</sup> H.G. Wells makes a reference to this effect in his *A Modern Utopia*: "With that absurd nearness of effect one gets in the Alps, we see the little train a dozen miles away, running down the Biaschina to Italy, and the Lukmanier Pass beyond Piora left of us, and the San Giacomo right, mere footpaths under our feet... And behold! In the twinkling of an eye we are in that other world!" H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, PDF eBook, 2004, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6424>. Accessed October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>380</sup> More, Bacon, and Neville, *Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia, New Atlantis and The Isle of Pines*, 13–14.

H.G. Wells employs the moving narrator effect when the protagonist walks through several landscapes in the short story “The Country of the Blind”. This story follows the utopian pattern of the protagonist accidentally stumbling upon a society organised according to different principles than the author’s or reader’s society.<sup>381</sup>

About midday he came at last out of the throat of the gorge into the plain and the sunlight. He was stiff and weary; he sat down in the shadow of a rock, filled up his flask with water from a spring and drank it down, and remained for a time resting before he went on to the houses.

They were very strange to his eyes, and indeed the whole aspect of that valley became, as he regarded it, queerer and more unfamiliar. The greater part of its surface was lush green meadow, starred with many beautiful flowers, irrigated with extraordinary care, and bearing evidence of systematic cropping piece by piece. High up and ringing the valley about was a wall, and what appeared to be a circumferential water-channel, from which the little trickles of water that fed the meadow plants came, and on the higher slopes above this flocks of llamas cropped the scanty herbage. Sheds, apparently shelters or feeding-places for the llamas, stood against the boundary wall here and there. The irrigation streams ran together into a main channel down the centre of the valley, and this was enclosed on either side by a wall breast high. This gave a singularly urban quality to this secluded place, a quality that was greatly enhanced by the fact that a number of paths paved with black and white stones, and each with a curious little kerb at the side, ran hither and thither in an orderly manner. The houses of the central village were quite unlike the casual and higgledy-piggledy agglomeration of the mountain villages he knew; they stood in a continuous row on either side of a central street of astonishing cleanness; here and there their particoloured facade was pierced by a door, and not a solitary window broke their even frontage.<sup>382</sup>

The description begins with general landscape features, agriculture, but also accompanying human-made infrastructure, such as irrigation systems. Then the view moves on to details of buildings and urban planning, which confirms the existence of inhabitants and foreshadows the encounter with them.

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<sup>381</sup> The effect of this particular story is probably different from such stories that critique a particular societal aspect of the author’s present and could probably be called a satirical utopia. I am making reference to it here, because it is structured according to the general utopian pattern of a traveller who finds a strange land by accident, takes part in local life and reports on it, in addition to which it gives another example for the moving narrator.

<sup>382</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Country of the Blind, and Other Stories*, 2004, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/11870>. Accessed April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

#### 4.3.2.3. Narrators interview omniscient locals

The strategy of telescoping descriptions and religious references found in Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* is striking and probably deserves discussion in an essay of its own. For now let it suffice to say, that "Salomon's House" on the island of New Atlantis is described to the narrator by "the father of Salomon's House". Thus, the seeming omniscience is attributed to a character who is not the protagonist utopian traveller, and thus the character's familiarity with this world-inside-the-temple is explained. Salomon's house includes a world of its own. The list of its facilities is extensive to say the least. In the example below both topography and infrastructure are mentioned, but since the narrator is an inhabitant of the place and intimately familiar with it, the function of buildings can also be given:

We have high towers, the highest about half a mile in height, and some of them likewise set upon high mountains, so that the vantage of the hill with the tower is in the highest of them three miles at least. And these places we call the upper region, accounting the air between the high places and the low as a middle region. We use these towers, according to their several heights and situations, for insulation, refrigeration, conservation, and for the view of divers meteors – as winds, rain, snow, hail, and some of the fiery meteors also. And upon them in some places are dwellings of hermits, whom we visit sometimes and instruct what to observe.<sup>383</sup>

Another example of a utopia that employs the device of the omniscient local almost exclusively is Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. All information the utopian traveller receives about the utopian future society comes from the members of his host family. As opposed to many other utopias which do not explicitly compare and contrast the utopian society with the protagonist's home society, the protagonist of *Looking Backward*, Julian West, discusses the concrete differences between the societies with his hosts extensively, and the host show some awareness of Julian's home society as well.

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<sup>383</sup> Bacon, "New Atlantis," 177–178.

#### 4.3.2.4. Numbers 13 implies moving protagonists, encounter with locals, and consequences of exploration

Each of these examples delivers a sweeping overview at the beginning of the utopia. There are certainly many more examples that deliver a similar approach to the initial description of landscape and infrastructure, while setting the story up for the eventual encounter with inhabitants. Numbers 13 exhibits the feature. First the scouts are instructed to ascend the mountain and “see the land”. The remainder of the narrative addresses each of the questions implicitly at some point.

*Table 1. Questions and implicit answers in Numbers 13*

Question	Answers
Are the people that dwell in it strong or weak, few or many? (13:18)	<p>However, the people that who inhabit the country are powerful [...]; moreover, we saw the Anakites there. (13:28)</p> <p>Amalekites dwell in the Negeb region; Hittites Jebusites, and Amorites inhabit the hill country; and Canaanites dwell by the Sea and along the Jordan. (13:29)</p> <p>We cannot attack the people, for it is stronger than we are. (13: 31)</p> <p>All the people that we saw in it are men of great size [...] (13:32)</p>
Is the country in which they dwell good or bad? (13: 19)	<p>[...] and there they cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes – it had to be borne on a carrying frame by two of them – and some pomegranates and figs. (13:23)</p> <p>[...] it does indeed flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. (13:27)</p> <p>The country that we traversed is one that devours its settlers. (13:32)</p>
Are the towns they live in open or fortified? (13:19)	[...] and the cities are fortified and very large [...] (13:28)
Is the soil rich or poor? (13:20)	[...] and there they cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes – it had



	to be borne on a carrying frame by two of them – and some pomegranates and figs. (13:23)  [...] it does indeed flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. (13:27)
Is it wooded or not? (13:20)	[...] and there they cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes – it had to be borne on a carrying frame by two of them – and some pomegranates and figs. (13:23)

Incidentally, the passages from literary utopias above describe similar issues as those which are foreshadowed in Numbers 13:17-20. The questions of Numbers 13:17-20 also pertain to issues of the land's fertility (that is agriculture), infrastructure, and flora, while foreshadowing an encounter with inhabitants.

Geographical inconsistencies in the Bible have been described as being a representation of a moving protagonist by Coats.<sup>384</sup> Coats engages with Noth's analysis of geographical confusion in his discussion of Numbers 20:14-21, which is one of the passages in which Israelites attempt to negotiate passage through enemy territory but fail. Noth writes:

The lack of connection between the wilderness stories and the preparation for the conquest from east of the Jordan is also revealed by this quite unmotivated leap from Kadesh to Edom.<sup>385</sup>

Coats, on the other hand, proposes to read this supposed "jump" from Kadesh to Edom as an image of movement, which is designed to underline the travelling movement: "It seems to me that the geographical terms serve, not so much to tie down points on the map that are constituent for the tradition, as to picture the people on the move."<sup>386</sup>

Coats' article is not concerned with utopia, but it is interesting that it proposes to solve geographical inconsistencies by suggesting that they indicate movement. I would add that the movement is not referring to an actual event of movement in the past, but rather to the movement of a fictional protagonist

<sup>384</sup> G.W. Coats, "Conquest Traditions in the Wilderness Theme," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95, no. 2 (1976): 180.

<sup>385</sup> Noth, *Numbers*, 151.

<sup>386</sup> Coats, "Conquest Traditions in the Wilderness Theme," 180.

whose route is inconsistent with realistic geographical features, because it is an invention made to highlight a few select aspects of geography that are important to the storyline.

The places of Numbers 13 (and of utopias) and their names are most convincingly readable as symbolic backgrounds. They serve as the canvas on which inhabitants appear. In Numbers 13 the story halts just there. While inhabitants play an important part in the subsequent slander of the land – it is because of them that some Israelites want to go back to Egypt – the story shifts from utopia to conquest narrative.

Whereas in a utopia the protagonist is usually portrayed as naïve but an eager learner, taken on a tour by a benevolent host, encounters in a context of conquests are not about learning *about* the inhabitants *from* the inhabitants in order to see more clearly one's own society but about imposing one's own notions onto the inhabitants and looking for ways to subdue them.<sup>387</sup> According to Greenblatt, European conquerors came equipped with similar cultural capital: confidence in one's own centrality, a political organisation around a chain of command, a willingness to coerce, a "religious ideology centered on the endlessly proliferated representation of a tortured and murdered god of love",<sup>388</sup> and the expectation of strangers to abandon their beliefs.

The utopian set-up is the reverse of such a conquest situation: the protagonist is not a conqueror but a guest. The locals are confident that their social system is advantageous, they do not need to coerce a visitor into following their way of life, because the system is so undeniably good that the visitor will become a believer on their own accord. If the utopian hosts are aware of the traveller's home, they often declare the traveller's home society "barbaric".<sup>389</sup> The utopian story aims to critique the home society, whereas in conquest narratives the utopia to be brought upon everyone else *is* the home society.

The encounter with the stranger is ambiguous in Numbers 13. The utopian outcome in a possible encounter would be the eradication of the stranger and the

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<sup>387</sup> "We can be certain only that European representations of the New World tell us something about the European practice of representation [...]" Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 7.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>389</sup> This happens repeatedly in Lane's feminist 19<sup>th</sup> century piece *Mizora* whenever the protagonist tells her hosts about customs and conventions in her home society.

possession of their land. The dystopian outcome of the spying situation would be that the powerful stranger residing in the fortified cities might assimilate the Israelites. Numbers 13 considers what the findings from the survey of the fictional space mean for the community: successful conquest or unsuccessful conquest. In most literary utopias, the consequences the encounter with the utopian space will have for the protagonists are only implied. We do not know whether Raphael Hythloday will form a political party to bring about a second Utopia in England. The relevance of the utopian sketch to the readers' own society is most often implicit in literary utopias. In Numbers 13 it is made explicit.

#### ***4.4. Inner-biblical comparison: Ezekiel's utopian boundaries are the same as Numbers' boundaries***

After comparing Numbers 13 to features found in extra-biblical utopias – *Utopia*, *Herland*, *Erewhon*, *New Atlantis* or “The Country of the Blind” – I have found that this biblical passage is utopian to such a high degree that I am comfortable saying that it appears as an anachronistic utopia to the modern reader. In the following I will show an inner-biblical comparison, which comes to the conclusion, that it is a biblical proto-utopia too.

Nadav Na'aman links the outline of the boundaries of the Promised Land as described in Numbers 34:1-12 to passages in Joshua 15:1-4 and Ezekiel 47:15-17.<sup>390</sup> Ezekiel 47 is a part of the vision of the future Jerusalem, often understood as a utopian vision.<sup>391</sup> Na'aman writes: “[...] I suggest that Numbers 34:1-12 depends on Joshua 15:1-4 and Ezekiel 47:15-17 [...] and is secondary to all

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<sup>390</sup> Nadav Na'aman, “Lebo-Hamath, Subat-Hamath and the Northern Boundary of the Land of Canaan,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 31 (1999): 433.

<sup>391</sup> For example by Brodsky, “Utopian Map” and by Liss, “Describe the Temple to the House of Israel’: Preliminary Remarks on the Temple Vision in the Book of Ezekiel and the Question of Fictionality in Priestly Literatures.” Arguing that Ezekiel is properly utopian is not the purpose here, I presuppose this. The comparison that makes perfectly clear that Ezekiel *is* utopian is the following line of influences: the mythological and utterly unreal Atlantis in Plato's dialogue *Critias* is divided up in a strikingly similar way to the way Ezekiel describes the division of the land and the organisation of the territory around the temple. More's *Utopia* is explicitly and obviously indebted to Plato's *Republic*, *Critias* is one of two dialogues that follow on from *Republic*, Atlantis is a utopian island similar to More's island of Utopia, Atlantis is organised similar to Jerusalem and the Promised Land in Ez 48.

these texts.”<sup>392</sup> Number 34 depends on a text – Ezekiel 47 and surrounding chapters – that is often described as a utopian vision of an ideal future state. Numbers 34 gives a more detailed list of border delineations and place names than Numbers 13. It actually outlines boundaries, whereas Numbers 13 does not mention explicitly that the places that are visited are located on boundaries. Only by comparing Numbers 13 with other passages that deal with boundaries explicitly, do we see that the places mentioned in Numbers 13 also appear in passages that speak about the boundaries of the future Promised Land, for example in Ezekiel 47 and Numbers 34.

Numbers 34:1-12 gives more place names than Numbers 13. Lebo-Hamath is mentioned (Num 34:8) as part of the border delineations of the northern boundary. Zin is one of the places mentioned to define the border on the southern boundary (Num 34:3). Kadesh appears, but only as the compound Kadesh-Barnea (Num 34: 4), of which it is said that the border shall run south of it.

The border description of Ezekiel has quite a few locations in common with Number 34:1-12, Lebo-Hamath being one of them. Lebo-Hamath is the only place name that occurs in Numbers 13, Numbers 34 and Ezekiel 47. A variation of Kadesh appears in all three passages too: in Numbers 13 as Kadesh, in Numbers 34 as Kadesh-Barnea, and in Ezekiel 47 as Meriboth-Kadesh. Milgrom sees Kadesh-Barnea and Meriboth-Kadesh as different designations for the same place, Kadesh.<sup>393</sup>

Na’aman makes assumptions about the intellectual horizon of the author, who is said to have used Ezekiel to write the border descriptions of Numbers 34: “The author of Numbers 34 did not comprehend Ezekiel’s description [...],”[which “depends on the system of Babylonian provinces”].<sup>394</sup> The author of Numbers 34, according to Na’aman, did not understand what he was reading in Ezekiel 47, because he was not familiar with the geography of a particular area:

The author was entirely dependent on written sources, and where sources were unavailable, he was unable to draw the boundary properly. All

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<sup>392</sup> Na’aman, “Lebo-Hamath,” 433.

<sup>393</sup> Milgrom, *Torah Commentary*, 104.

<sup>394</sup> Na’aman, “Lebo-Hamath,” 434.

demarcations of the eastern boundary of Canaan on the basis of Numbers 34 are guesswork.<sup>395</sup>

Numbers 34 may have been created relying on not much more than the utopian written source of Ezekiel 47. Does Numbers 34 have anything to do with Numbers 13? Numbers 34, as mentioned, gives a much more extensive collection of place names than Numbers 13. The place names that coincide are Zin, Kadesh and Lebo-Hamath. It is possible to say that if Numbers 34 draws on Ezekiel 47, and the author of Numbers 34 did not have knowledge of the actual locations of the places in Ezekiel 47, that Numbers 13 is similarly a description of vague places of which the author had no concrete knowledge. This would also support the observation made earlier that a focus on mapping and places can occur in texts when the author (or the audience) is not familiar with a place.

Na'aman concludes that maps are not eternal and that there may have been “a break in the concept of Canaan’s northern borders between the Late Bronze and the late Iron Age.”<sup>396</sup> Na'aman is a further voice supporting the conjecture that the author was not familiar with the environment described in the text, which supports my argument that Numbers 13 is a biblical utopia, because it has in common with classic utopian texts the feature of the invented map.

Secondly, maps and boundaries are subject to changes, so that even if an empirical place is referenced the map is subject to changes over time. As such, the described boundary is a representation that does not exist diachronically and thus cannot be taken literally independent of the age of the text in which it is described, and it cannot be located. It is thereby made utopian, both from the modern reader’s perspective, and also, according to Na'aman, from the author’s perspective.

#### ***4.5. Maps, utopias, and the Bible: summary and implications***

The utopian map is not real. But are non-utopian maps real? Just like utopia has been called a heuristic device (by Suvin, with whom I agree), a map is a heuristic device too. A map is a representation which contains a select view. It

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 435.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 436.

can be political, topographical, economic, or physical. Borges' short story "Of Exactitude in Science" (also referenced by Marin) points out that maps are an inadequate representation, which can never represent all of reality. In Borges' short text, an empire in which cartography was developed to near-perfection is dissatisfied with its maps' inaccurate portrayal of reality and devises a map that is an exact 1:1 copy of the empire. Following generations, which are "less attentive to the study of cartography", abandon this 1:1 mapping project, and "tattered fragments of the map are still to be found, sheltering an occasional beast or beggar [...]." <sup>397</sup>

Like Borges' map, the map of Numbers 13 is tattered at best. The mapping of Numbers 13 is a sweeping surveying map similar to those often found in the opening chapters of conventional literary utopias. The map of Numbers 13 focuses on borders and outlines, but its main theme is not to sketch the boundaries of the land as certain other biblical passages do, for example Numbers 34. The map of Numbers 13 could be read as political to some degree in that respect. However, the route or survey described is ambiguous: did the spies go to Hebron? Who went to Hebron? Did they scout the entire land or just the south? This is one aspect that makes the supposedly political map utopian, in that it cannot be rendered graphically.

To a modern Bible reader, many of the locales mentioned are "no-places" because they cannot be located precisely or at all. In the eyes of this assumed modern reader the text becomes utopian. Na'aman speculates that the author of the mapping passage of Numbers 34 did not know the area described. We might therefore conjecture that the map was also a utopian map when it was first "drawn" (that is, written): it attempted to make a territory appear more real than it was at the time of writing.

The conjecture that the maps of Numbers 34 and 13 were utopian maps when they were written does not mean that its creators invented places with an intention to deceive a readership. The place names may have been earnest attempts to describe a perceived past or utopian future territory. A utopia is not a lie or an intentional deception or falsification. It uses mapping and topography

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<sup>397</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *A Universal History of Infamy* (London: Penguin Books, 1975), 131.

for its end, which is to produce a credible narrated environment to serve as a heuristic device to speak about real issues the author faced in reality.

The perception of places and maps is not static. Levine writes that “in the priestly perception, Kadesh was located in the Wilderness of Paran.”<sup>398</sup> Borges demonstrates that maps are always inaccurate representations of certain aspects of reality, which is exactly what many utopian theorists say about utopias. Na’aman argues that there was “a break in the concept of Canaan’s northern borders”<sup>399</sup> from one historical era to another. Maps are not eternal, neither topographical ones nor political ones, while the former probably have a somewhat longer shelf-life.

Levine’s language admits implicitly that maps are not only incomplete representations of certain aspects, but in addition to that, are representations of a specific group’s or individual’s view of certain aspects of reality. “In the *priestly* perception” a place was located in a particular area. This seems to beg for an addition, such as: “In *another group*’s perception it was located elsewhere.”

Numbers 13 contains an episode in which a place is named. The spies harvest grapes and the text says that the place was named “Wadi Eshcol” after this event. While this is an aspect which makes the episode seem rather like a conqueror’s diary than a utopia<sup>400</sup> in which the utopian traveller generally accepts and reports native toponyms, it is interesting that this particular example of biblical name-and-claim is a place not to be found by anyone since “the name seems to have been retained by *no place* at all.”<sup>401</sup>

Whitelam writes: “The choice of language, the naming of the land, is part of the manipulation of power in which relationship to the land is affirmed or denied.”<sup>402</sup> Interestingly, the non-topography of a rather fantastic event is claimed here. The only place whose name is explained etiologically, wadi Eshcol, is the one place even those scholars who seek to locate every other toponym do not attempt to locate.

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<sup>398</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 355.

<sup>399</sup> Na’aman 1999, 463.

<sup>400</sup> Columbus’ writings mention naming (and claiming) islands frequently, for example in J. M. Cohen and Cristóbal Colón, *The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus: being his own log-book, letters and dispatches with connecting narrative drawn from the Life of the Admiral by his son Hernando Colon and other contemporary historians* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), 60.

<sup>401</sup> Noth, *Numbers*, 106. My emphasis.

<sup>402</sup> Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel*, 55.

It has been shown by scholars like Keith Whitelam,<sup>403</sup> Philip Davies<sup>404</sup> or Edward Said that realities are created if enough material exists that acknowledges certain statements as the truth. Whitelam cites Said's *Orientalism*:

Most importantly such texts can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it.<sup>405</sup>

By now quite a few texts exist that point out the reality-creating capacity of older canonical scholarly texts, such as Noth's. Reading a biblical passage as utopia adds evidence, not only from the passage itself but also from scholars' treatment of the passage. In conjunction, the passage and conservative criticism of the passage make the passage quite justifiably readable as a utopia. Particularly, I want to suggest that the aspect of the ambiguous locations, which biblical scholars such as Noth, Levine, Milgrom and many others try to explain or resolve as if the locations reflected historical reality, testifies not so much to the reality of a place or the historicity of a journey, but rather testifies to their fiction.

As the route sketched in Numbers 13 is just one version to enable one story – that of the Israelites' conquest and eradication of the land's inhabitants – maps created by theologians or biblical scholars are representations of one possible reality too, quite likely reflecting a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century theologian's reality rather than "biblical reality". In Whitelam's words about Baly's *The Geography of the Bible*:

It is theological assumptions and biblical definitions which ultimately determine any understanding of the region. This is confirmed by the map at the beginning of the book entitled "Old Testament Palestine" in which the regional designations are all biblical tribal designations: "Zebulun", "Manasseh", "Ephraim", "Benjamin", etc. The theological claims of the Hebrew Bible have been given priority in determining the designation of

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<sup>403</sup> Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel*.

<sup>404</sup> Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel*.

<sup>405</sup> Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel*, 4.



the land, thereby silencing any alternative claims to understanding the region and its past.<sup>406</sup>

While Numbers 13 does not contain a graphical map, it contains the description of a journey which some have attempted to map by describing it and locating the places visited, for example Rashi or Noth. Maps have propagandistic potential. If this map is read as a utopian map, the setting of the Promised Land becomes properly and literally *u-topian*. The inclusion of place names and the description of the route of the spies reinforce the fiction of the location, instead of emphasising its realistic topography, just like the maps in *Lord of the Rings*, *Treasure Island* or *Utopia* are needed specifically because the location is not known, either to the writer or to the audience.

This utopian reading assumes that a map is included in a narrative because the place described is *not* known and may not even exist. The map is first and foremost a heuristic device to reflect on self and other as it does in utopias. In the story of Numbers 13, the territory symbolised by the map exists not yet for the wandering Israelites. It did not exist in the empirical reality of the authoring community under Persian rule, and it does not exist today, even if biblical scholars attempt to locate biblical events on a modern-day map.

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 51–52.

## 5. William Bradford and the Utopia of Numbers 13

### *Chapter summary*

The previous chapter showed how some authoritative Bible commentary helps us to argue that Numbers 13 is a utopia from a modern reader's point of view, even if a commentator takes the stories in the Bible to represent a geographical and/or past reality. This chapter looks at another reading – this time not by a critical Bible scholar but by a “committed” reader, from whose perspective the stakes of interpreting the Bible “correctly” are directly linked with personal salvation and divine favour. This reader's reading will be analysed as one example of how different readings of the same text from different perspectives can bring the text into a precarious relationship with a given reality.

William Bradford's text *Of Plymouth Plantation* is one of many texts by Puritan pilgrims which appear to use the Bible to justify colonial actions in New England. They approach the land to which they are traveling with utopian expectations, which are adapted from biblical images. Though their intentions may have been sincere within their belief system, a contemporary reader can and should point to the afterlife of some committed readings. This chapter focuses on the family resemblance between Numbers 13 and a colonial conquest story as well as a utopian discovery story, and shows that either or both can be seen by the passage's readers.

As pointed out above (in 4.3.2.4.), the relationship between protagonist and stranger is different in conquest narratives as opposed to utopias. The presence of residents of the Promised Land becomes especially visible when we take Bradford's adaptation of the utopian passage and consider how he deals with the presence of Native Nations in New England, relying on biblical Canaanites as a cognitive template. This chapter concludes that it is likely that a reader who believes in the biblical text's literality not only believes in the attainment of a personal utopia (in the real world or in heaven), but may also embrace ideologies

found in the biblical text, which indicate that causing significant harm to others is the way to attain a utopia for the “chosen” people. There is a dystopian downside to utopias and it is important to uncover the dystopia within biblical utopias.

### **5.1. *Progressing towards the ambiguous paradise of America***

Until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, paradise (could have) existed on earth.<sup>407</sup> Columbus’ writings express the idea that paradise is locatable. The settlers of New England of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century use comparisons of the encountered locations to paradise and the land of Canaan, and they do so with an understanding of being actors in a continuous story that has gone on since biblical times. They do not see themselves as literally returning to biblical paradise but as progressing towards a parallel future version of it.

Mircea Eliade summarises many records by early settlers that compare New England explicitly to Canaan or paradise.<sup>408</sup> Eliade also describes the link between eschatology and a religious belief in progress. However, the concept of utopia – though present in Eliade’s title – is not brought into the discussion enough. It seems to be assumed that utopia simply equals paradise.

“The pioneers considered themselves in the situation of the Israelites after the crossing of the Red Sea, just as, in their eyes, their condition in England and Europe had been a sort of Egyptian bondage.”<sup>409</sup> I will demonstrate below that this is almost, but not quite, the case. The pioneers considered themselves even more “chosen” than the biblical Israelites. The biblical template that would be the obvious choice to turn to for parallels would of course be the narrative presented in Exodus-Numbers: “Hebrew thought introduces into the utopian tradition [...] a teleologic time that progresses towards an end that is the Promised Land.”<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 5.

<sup>408</sup> Mircea Eliade, “Paradise and Utopia: Mythical Geography and Eschatology,” in *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, ed. Frank E. Manuel (London: Souvenir, 1973), 260–280. Specifically pages 264–265 summarise various settlers’ comparisons of America to the Garden of Eden or the land of Canaan.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>410</sup> Fortunati, “The Metamorphosis of the Apocalyptic Myth,” 82.

One might expect that particularly Numbers 13 may have had an impact on what was seen by the early settlers of New England. The paradisiacal potential of the Promised Land – the confirmation of a return to the vicinity of Eden – is not absent from Numbers 13. However (foreshadowing the next chapter of this thesis on the oscillation between utopia and dystopia), the perception of the New World as a quasi-Eden is only one side of a thaumatrope. The ambiguity found in Numbers 13 also appears in conquest literature. Those who encounter the quasi-Eden of New England, just like the spies who encounter the land of Numbers 13, find that the land is already inhabited by an Other:

For many immigrants, the New World represented a desert haunted by demonic beings. This, however, did not diminish their eschatological exaltation, for they were told in sermons that the present miseries were but a moral and spiritual trial before arriving at the Earthly Paradise that had been promised to them.<sup>411</sup>

In my discussion of Bradford below, I reference this perspective again. The understanding of oneself as progressing towards heavenly paradise has an impact on Bradford's reading of biblical stories. He emphasises that his community has learned from the mistakes the Israelites may have made when they rejected the Promised Land because of their fear of resident tribes or adverse conditions.

The first pioneers did not doubt that the final drama of moral regeneration and universal salvation would begin with them, since they were the first to follow the sun in its course toward the paradisiacal gardens of the West.<sup>412</sup>

They do not regard themselves as re-enacting the biblical story absolutely literally but find enough parallels to view reality in the light of the biblical story.

## 5.2. *Readers re-work narratives to match reality*

In this chapter, I study one example of a Bible reading – or Bible re-working – by a member of a particular concrete community of Bible readers (which I

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<sup>411</sup> Eliade, "Paradise and Utopia: Mythical Geography and Eschatology," 265.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 264.

would be happy to call an interpretive community, following Fish<sup>413</sup>). The description of this example assumes the existence of a wide variety of “committed” Bible readers. The example given here, of William Bradford and Cotton Mather, does not represent a paradigmatic case. The category “committed reader” is one I have invented. I take it to mean a reader of the Bible whose approach to interpreting biblical texts is to a large degree influenced by a belief that the correct interpretation and correctly derived behaviour will lead to personal salvation.<sup>414</sup> A reader of the Bible who interprets the biblical text in order to derive from it insights into the socio-political situation in ancient Palestine is committed too, but committed to a project different from the belief in attaining heaven or hell.

Ammerman describes different approaches to religious identity, but of course from a modern point of view and from a perspective in which the concept of post-secularism exists. Concepts derived from empirical ethnographic studies in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century do not translate directly onto the world studied here, of William Bradford and Cotton Mather. However, to approach an exemplary group of “committed” readers to compare to an ideal type of a “committed” reader, the distinctions between different approaches to interpreting the biblical text and to being a member of a religious community as described by Ammerman are a useful starting point.

From a post-secular perspective, she speaks of differentiated religious identity and individualised religious identity. A person may be affiliated with a religious institution, and also affiliated with secular institutions.<sup>415</sup> It has been observed that there is a tendency in the modern world to individualise religion, separating personal beliefs from beliefs or dogmas prescribed by institutions.<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> “Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading but for writing texts, for constituting their properties.” Stanley Eugene Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 14.

<sup>414</sup> Not unlike the description of fundamentalist approaches to the Bible described by Katherine C. Boone: “If one’s eternal destiny depends on a right relationship with God, and if that God is reliably known only through the Bible, it follows that one must read, and read correctly. Put another way, there is no comparison between the risk of publishing a dim-witted scholarly article and the danger of burning in hell.” Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 13. These examples are two extremes on different ends of one possible sliding scale one could use to differentiate between what I call here “committed” readers and academic readers.

<sup>415</sup> “For many, membership in a congregation is one among many memberships that establish them as proper citizens of a community.” Ammerman, *Bible Believers*, 2.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

These extremes must be seen as anachronistic categories we can use to compare historical phenomena to some degree. The ideal types proposed by Allport and Ross in 1967 appear to be less distinctly tied to a modern, that is “post-secular” world. Allport and Ross differentiate between extrinsic and intrinsic orientation in religious belief. Extrinsic orientation means that religion is used for an end:

Persons with this orientation may find religion useful in a variety of ways – to provide security and solace, sociability and distraction, status and self-justification. The embraced creed is lightly held or else selectively shaped to fit more primary needs.<sup>417</sup>

Intrinsic orientation means that religion is in itself the end and a worldview is shaped around it:

Persons with this orientation find their master motive in religion. Other needs, strong as they may be, are regarded as of less ultimate significance, and they are, so far as possible, brought into harmony with the religious beliefs and prescriptions.<sup>418</sup>

Allport and Ross state that “seldom, if ever, does one encounter a ‘pure’ case”<sup>419</sup> and treat their differentiation as ideal types. I find Allport and Ross’ differentiation useful as a theoretical empirical framework to “read” Bible readers, because it is not tied as explicitly to a post-secular context. Using this particular ideal typical sliding scale, it is possible to point to the following family resemblances between Bradford and Mather and the extrinsic/intrinsic differentiation put forward by Allport and Ross.

One might understand Bradford’s interpretation of encounters with Native Nations and especially the encounter with one Nation’s winter supplies (which are taken to help Bradford’s community survive the winter) as an interpretation of reality that uses knowledge of and belief in the Bible as a justification. Bible knowledge is used to justify an event in reality, which is disconnected from the Bible or belief. One might assume a cynical instrumental use of the Bible or

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<sup>417</sup> Gordon W. Allport and J. Michael Ross, “Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 5, no. 4 (1967): 434.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

belief to meet an extrinsic end, the justification of theft in order to guarantee one's own survival.

However, Bradford's worldview could also be approached with the assumption that his beliefs are sincere.<sup>420</sup> In this case, the way in which he deals with a challenging reality in biblical terms is almost completely intrinsic: he harmonises encountered reality with his religious worldview. It depends on the historian – the reader of Bradford-the-Bible-reader – what we see and which conclusions we draw from given material, using anachronistic scales and methods. Even distinctly empirical disciplines must be aware of the role the researcher plays when approaching questions about religion and belief.<sup>421</sup>

Bradford may have regarded Numbers 13 (or other passages about the Promised Land) as a utopia as Roemer describes it. A utopia is an “[...] imaginary world that will invite readers to imagine their own alternatives to the author's alternative.”<sup>422</sup> Bradford's perception of reality, if we view it as modelled on a utopia, could be coloured by this imagination. New England is not literally the same as the biblical Promised Land, but the utopia of the Promised Land is the invitation or the model that invites Bradford's biblically inspired imagination of his reality.

Both lands – New England tinted by the idea of the Promised Land and the Promised Land tinted by a utopian impossibility – connect hypothetical realities and imaginations. Pardes writes:

I do not wish to refute the literal aspects of Canaan or the historical thrust of the narrative but rather to show that the Promised Land much like the nation that calls it “home,” has an imaginary base.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Similar, in a way, to Boone: “Fundamentalists have been accused of ‘hiding behind the Bible,’ cynically manipulating a sacred text to garner divine sanction for their hidden private and public agenda. I am convinced, however, that most fundamentalists are sincere in their Bible belief.” Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 1.

<sup>421</sup> There are, for example, at least four scales to measure empirically religious fundamentalism: “Not all measures of religion are created equal; some are better than others, in that they conform more closely to certain standards of good measurement [...]” Ralph W. Hood, Peter C. Hill, and Bernard Spilka, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2009), 12.

<sup>422</sup> Roemer, *Utopian Audiences*, 61.

<sup>423</sup> Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel*, 108.

There are literal aspects to biblical Canaan, of course. We find that some of these literal aspects of Numbers 13 appear when they are suddenly enacted by Bradford in another Promised Land, Bradford's Cape Cod.

Pardes continues:

For the spies [of Numbers 13], the Promised Land is not merely an Old World awaiting their return. It resembles a threatening – though marvellous – New World whose relation to Israelite historiography is questionable.<sup>424</sup>

Since the relation between the Promised Land and Israelite historiography is already questionable, the Promised Land is even more questionable in relation to the perception of reality by Bradford as a newcomer to the New World of New England.

There is a strong utopian connection between the biblical Promised Land and the transfer of the idea of a Promised Land into a 17<sup>th</sup> century New England reality: "People who are engaged in utopian projects tend to envision the world in a state of being that precedes another state of being."<sup>425</sup> Bradford may see his encounter with the Promised New World as a state that precedes the ultimate utopia of heaven. Moreover, "utopian movements often stimulate [...] a widely shared sense of being a 'chosen people' with a special destiny."<sup>426</sup> It will become clear below, by analysing how Bradford differentiates his community from the biblical template community, that he does regard his community as chosen, and also that the story of the biblical Israelites, perceived by Bradford to be history rather than story, is changed slightly: "In order to create and sustain the idea that the group is somehow a 'chosen people' history is often rewritten in a way that confirms this idea."<sup>427</sup> As pointed out above, Bradford's stakes at putting his community onto a "chosen" historical trajectory may have been inspired by a sincere belief in the possibility of attaining divine favour and, ultimately, heaven.

I will play through the example of the utopian place and its re-appropriated version in Bradford's text below, but I want to prefix the following: Bradford's

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid., 109–110.

<sup>425</sup> Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies*, 4.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 4–5.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 8.



treatment of the fictional utopia of the Promised Land has implications. By extension, every reading of the biblical Promised Land as more real than heuristic and utopian has implications. The Promised Land is a utopia, but it can have real-life dystopian consequences if this fact is disregarded.

The biblical text is available to committed and non-committed interpreters, and even if scholars were to agree that the biblical conquest, for example, never took place as told in the biblical stories, the potential of the biblical text being understood as a faithful rendition of a historical reality and used as a blueprint to achieve a supposed real-life utopia remains:

Historical scholarship may tell a different story; but even if the annihilation did not take place, the narratives tell what happened to those indigenous people who put their hope and faith in ideas and gods that were foreign to their culture [...]. Confronting the conquest stories as a narrative rather than as a historical problem is especially important given the tenor of contemporary theology and criticism. [...] The danger is that these communities [believing communities] will read the narratives, not the history behind them.<sup>428</sup>

I cannot emphasise enough the importance of following a biblical reading through all the way to the hypothetical diachronic reader and not underestimating the power that is contained in a “committed” reading whose interpreter’s sincere motif is to avoid eternal damnation by interpreting the biblical text as what is perceived to be “correct”.

It is not enough to conclude that a biblical story is not an account of a historical reality. This argument is incomplete, because the Bible is not available exclusively to biblical scholars arguing about historical minimalism. The scholars involved in such debates are not going to use the Bible to enforce a religious-political programme, be that inside a small community or inside a larger nation. The danger of the Bible lies in what those interpreters draw from the text, who are not involved in academic debates about its historicity, but who are using the stories either extrinsically or intrinsically (in Allport and Ross’ sense) as instructions for everyday life, or as a hermeneutic free-for-all, where everyone can interpret into or out of whichever translation of the biblical text is available to them. Warrior, for example, has already put a warning label on the

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<sup>428</sup> Warrior, “A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” 292.

Exodus-Numbers stories: “It is these stories of deliverance and conquest that are ready to be picked up and believed by anyone wondering what to do about the people who already live in their promised land.”<sup>429</sup>

A constructive and probably more difficult approach is to engage with text, history, and the text’s readers. It will become apparent that the text and its reception and application in reality have brought about both positive and negative outcomes, often depending on whose version of history one reads. The historical impacts a text can have, no matter how fictional the text is found to be by secular scholars, should be factored into the utopian and dystopian potential of the fiction.

Said criticises Walzer’s treatment, or rather avoidance of history in his discussion of Exodus as a liberating text:

The great avoidance, significantly, is of history itself – the history of the text he comments on, the history of the Jews, the history of the various peoples who have used Exodus, as well as those who have not, the history of models, texts, paradigms, utopias, their relationship to actual events, the history of such things as covenants and founding texts.<sup>430</sup>

Bradford is not the only one propagating the image of New England as Canaan or the idea of Native Nations as Canaanites, but he appears to be one of those figures at the beginning of a longer development of the transferal of a “source concept carried over to the target domain concept of American Indians resulting in the conceptual metaphor AMERICAN INDIANS ARE THE CANAANITES OR PAGANS IN THE PROMISED LAND.”<sup>431</sup> The Old Testament is seen, as Newcomb writes, as a “colonial adventure story”:<sup>432</sup>

We might say that the story of the Lord’s promise to the chosen people is the tale of a divine land grant analogous to a papal bull and to the various royal colonial charters that were issued by Christian European monarchs during the Age of Discovery.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid.

<sup>430</sup> Said, “Michael Walzer’s ‘Exodus and Revolution’: A Canaanite Reading,” 292.

<sup>431</sup> Steven T. Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2008), xxii. Capitals in original.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

The divine land grant was of course “made independent of the will of the Canaanites and other indigenous peoples of the region.”<sup>434</sup>

In this way, the utopia of the Promised Land was initially mapped onto a reality by committed reader-believers of the biblical text. The transferral happens not absolutely literally. The readers read narratives, not history. They read the narratives of the Bible as a history that is available for re-working to apply more directly to their reality. It is here that the utopia shows clearly its dystopian potential. In the biblical story of Numbers 13 Canaanites and other peoples appear as a short textual reference. When other peoples appear in Bradford’s reality too, the biblical template of how to react to their presence is readily available: they are perceived as a divinely sent obstacle which the majority of the biblical Israelites stumbled across. Bradford’s creative history is crafted to convey the thought that his “chosen” community will not commit the same mistakes as the Israelites.

### 5.3. *William Bradford reads Numbers 13*<sup>435</sup>

The literary characters of Numbers 13 have left the only home they have ever known to come to the Promised Land, granted to them in the problematic divine land grant. The 12 spies are sent ahead to explore this land, and instructed to bring back a sample of the land’s produce. In their report, they confirm the ideal agrarian properties of this land flowing with milk and honey. The resident tribes are listed: Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, Canaanites, and the mythological Anakites (vv. 28-29). The characters Caleb and Joshua support the idea of a conquest but the other spies disagree: “We cannot attack that people, for it is stronger than we” (v. 31). Following this majority opinion,<sup>436</sup> the members of the community petition to return to Egypt rather than to embark on the seemingly impossible conquest. The community is punished for its opposition to the idea of divinely led conquest by being condemned to desert wandering, which none of its members will survive to actually settle in the

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>435</sup> An earlier version of this section was published in 2012. Frauke Uhlenbruch, “Promised Land into Real-Life Utopia? Utopian Theory, Numbers 13 and *Of Plymouth Plantation*,” *eSharp*, no. 18: Challenges of Development (2012): 26–34.

<sup>436</sup> On the majority report of the ten spies, see Curzer, “Spies and Lies.”

Promised Land. 10 spies are punished immediately (Num 14:37), only Joshua and Caleb – the “righteous” spies – survive to lead the eventual conquest.

The story implies that doubt in the existence of the utopia of a Promised Land is a sinful act that undermines divine authority. Individuals who express such thoughts of doubt in utopia, we are told, are doomed to be punished. This story leads up to the description of an eventually successful conquest of the Promised Land with divine consent, which the two faithful spies Joshua and Caleb lead. The passage shows in an example that those who believe in the divinely promised utopia will be rewarded, and that those who remark that utopia is unrealistic will be killed.

In Numbers 13 the slandering spies are ready to abandon hope for utopia, because they see a flaw in the utopian space: it is already settled by others. This position is both the majority view and the subversive view in this particular text. The ideology implied is that if other people(s) are encountered in a geographical space which is propagated as utopian it is *not* the right reaction to refrain from conquest, even if a majority vote suggests retreat as a better option.

William Bradford engages with and responds to the exemplary text of Numbers 13, to stress that his community is even more divinely chosen than the Israelite protagonists of the biblical passage, and that his community would not rebel against the provision of a Promised Land. Bradford implies that his community learned from their supposed Israelite forbears, using this interpretive move to smoothen out his community’s progress towards divine favour and heaven.

Bradford’s report includes an account of events leading up to the journey to New England, including immigration to Holland from England hoping to find freedom of religion, some years of dwelling in Holland under difficult circumstances, and finally the journey to America in 1620. The first few chapters run in more or less continuous prose. For the years 1620 to 1646, the text takes the form of annals. Both Bradford and John Winthrop, who introduced the “city upon a hill” simile from Matthew 5:14 as an identification trope for New England settlers in his sermon “A Model of Christian Charity”, were described as Moses-like leaders by Cotton Mather.<sup>437</sup> These constructed

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<sup>437</sup> Harvey Wish in his introduction to Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 1.

Moses-like Puritans were criticised by Thomas Morton, who also refers to their constructed identification with the biblical Israelites in his parody *New English Canaan* of 1634.

*Of Plymouth Plantation* shows implicitly how Bradford understands the Puritan community to be especially favoured by divine providence. Events are either experienced as being divinely sanctioned and linked to biblical narratives, or crafted to appear that way in the report, “[a]fter all, [Bradford] was telling the story of a new Exodus strikingly similar to the journeys of the Israelites.”<sup>438</sup> Religious persecution in England and adverse living conditions in Holland are named as reasons for leaving Europe to settle in the “vast & unpeopled countries of America, which are frutfull & fitt for habitation [...]”<sup>439</sup>

An episode described in chapter 10 of William Bradford’s *Of Plymouth Plantation* bears remarkable and explicit resemblance to the spy episode of Numbers 13. However, Bradford subtly addresses important discontinuities. Chapter 9 of *Of Plymouth Plantation* closes with the sentence, “May not & ought not the children of these fathers, rightly say: *Our faithers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness* [...]”<sup>440</sup>

This is an implicit reference to the book of Numbers. Most incidences of rebellion by the Israelites against Moses and/or God in the threshold situations described in the book of Numbers contain an allusion to not being willing to die in the wilderness for such a dangerous and seemingly hopeless endeavour as conquering the Promised Land. YHWH’s punishment is, indeed, to let one generation of Israelites die in the desert.

Bradford’s statement not only links the Pilgrims to the wandering Israelites but also conveys a certain air of superiority. Bradford emphasises the willingness of his community to die for their endeavour to settle in the Promised Land of America. The Pilgrims, this statement seems to convey, are not about to murmur against their Promised Land, against their god or their leaders; they will not be known to later generations as the generation which rejected the gift of a Promised Land. Bradford demonstrates here a reading of the Bible, aimed to

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 40. All citations from Bradford are spelled as found in the cited source. We take note that America is described here as an “empty” land.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 61. Emphasis in original.

show that he has understood the message. He has “correctly” interpreted biblical stories about rebellion and drawn from them a message for his own situation.

The ideological message of Numbers 13 implies that if utopia cannot be achieved, it is because of subversive realists who point out that it is an impossible goal. This Puritan account of settling the Promised Land will not be caught committing such a mistake during the community’s progress to what was possibly taken for a concrete paradise. It might be for this reason that Bradford’s rendering of the episode lacks references to dystopian elements.<sup>441</sup> After all, the description of the Promised Land in the Bible as potentially not ideal, is considered to be the sin that delays the conquest of the Promised Land.

After this initial allusion to biblical Israelites, who were unwilling to die on their way to the Promised Land, chapter 10 of *Of Plymouth Plantation* describes how a group of Pilgrims leave the ship (on which they dwell near Cape Cod, still looking for an appropriate place to settle) to explore the land. 16 armed emissaries, commanded by Captain Standish leave the ship and encounter “5. or 6. persons with a dogg coming towards them, who were salvages [...]”<sup>442</sup> The locals flee and the 16 Puritan spies take up pursuit in order to find their settlement, to find out whether they could communicate with them, as the text states. Then, though, we find statements like this:

It is recorded in scripture as a mercie to the apostle & his shipwraked company, that the barbarians shewed them no smale kindness in refreshing them, but these savage barbarians, when they mette with them (as after will appeare) were readier to fill their sids full of arrows then otherwise.<sup>443</sup>

The text furthermore mentions the Pilgrims being well armed. Such statements set up a scenario that would indicate that in reality, the Pilgrims are not setting out on a peaceful diplomatic mission but are prepared for armed combat.

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<sup>441</sup> It has been pointed out, for example by Wish (in *Ibid.*, 9.) that the death of Bradford’s wife, who drowned just after arrival at Cape Cod, is not mentioned in Bradford’s records. Historians speculate that she may have committed suicide. Suicide would be a strong expression of dissent and fear, which Bradford’s text aims to eradicate from the tale.

<sup>442</sup> Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 62.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

Eventually the Puritan spies lose the Native group's trail. The landscape is described as getting harder to hike, and the spies are desperately thirsty. When they find water, Bradford describes the experience in the following way:

But at length they found water & refreshed them selves, being the first New-England water they drunke of, and was now in thir great thirste as pleasante unto them as wine or bear had been in for-times.<sup>444</sup>

The exaggerated idealised quality of the water found in the unknown place could be linked with the episode of the exaggeratedly large cluster of grapes found in the land flowing with milk and honey. Obviously, the large grape can be read in a number of ways. It could be a literary symbol similar to the New-England water that is almost as good as wine or beer. Both seem like Cockayne/*Schlaraffenland* tropes and could be explained by an experience of arriving in a strange place and therefore expecting strange and wonderful things, and/or experiencing a feeling of relief after a situation in which subsistence was not guaranteed.

However, the biblical story about the spies is a story written and distributed in a particular (different) historic situation, not an account of an actual event. If the exaggerated grape is a metaphor for a feeling of awe and wonder upon arrival in a strange land or of relief after a period of deprivation, it would mean that it is not an immediate metaphor but one that has survived in tellings and re-tellings.

The Puritan accounts have to be read with similar caution with regard to their representation of an objective truth. Greenblatt notes that “we can be certain only that European representations of the New World tell us something about the European practice of representation [...]” and urges the interpreter of such accounts to exercise “epistemological suspicion.”<sup>445</sup>

In *Of Plymouth Plantation*, the episode most closely associated with the biblical grape episode follows after the discovery of the exaggeratedly great water. The 16 Pilgrim spies find an abandoned village, including graves, a cooking site and a recently harvested cornfield. They find

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>445</sup> Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 7.

heaps of sand [...], which they, digging up, found in them diverce faire Indean baskets filled with corne, and some in eares, faire and good, of diverce colours, which seemed to them a very goodly sight (having never seen any shuch before).<sup>446</sup>

The Pilgrims have never seen corn before. The appearance of it may have been as marvellous as an unexpectedly large cluster of grapes. An important discontinuity between this text and the biblical parallel episode about finding food in the Promised Land is that this is obviously a site of carefully cultivated produce, not a wild growing cluster of grapes picked off a branch. While the template-spies of Numbers were foraging, the Puritan spies commit theft. Later in the text, when Bradford describes finding more corn and beans on another exploration, it is mentioned that

the corne and beans they brought away, purposing to give them full satisfaction when they should meete with any of them (as about some 6. months afterward they did, to their good contente).<sup>447</sup>

This interjection attempts to portray the stealing as buying or borrowing, but there is neither agreement nor contract; the vendor does not know he is selling his corn to the Pilgrims. In fact, the vendor has been chased away by the well-armed Puritan emissaries. Being reimbursed (in foreign currency?) some six months later in the middle of the summer would not help to meet immediate needs in the winter. The passage about being glad to finally be able to meet and reimburse the Natives for the food the Pilgrims stole, is an attempt to conceal the theft of food and a grave mistake in planning: leaving to settle in an unknown place at the beginning of winter and not taking enough food supplies. Divine favour is emphasised when it is said that without having found the corn stash on the first explorative journey and the corn and beans on the second journey, they would not have had any seeds to grow the following year and no food to satisfy immediate demands in the winter.

The Puritan emissaries, taking the corn, return to their home base. Now Bradford references Numbers 13:

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<sup>446</sup> Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 63.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid., 64.



[...] they returned to the ship, least they should be in fear of their saftie; and tooke with them parte of the corne, and buried up the rest, and so like the men from Eshcoll carried with them of the fruits of the land, & showed their brethren; of which, & their returne, they were marvelously glad, and their harts encouraged.<sup>448</sup>

Bradford references the story to justify an actual event. We might go as far as assuming that he would have understood the biblical story to refer to an actual event and that behaving “correctly” in a situation so similar to the biblical description was seen as a successfully overcome obstacle on a progress towards salvation.

The biblical spies were more or less divinely commanded to harvest local fruit. The excitement of finding this continuity between the Bible and his own experience probably overshadowed the apparent inconsistency that the Bible does not mention the Israelite spies raiding the Amalekites’ cultivated vegetable garden. Finding (and stealing) the Native Nation’s corn is crafted into a miraculous episode: the Pilgrims start their exploration on November 15<sup>th</sup>. Finding food in November in New England is almost as miraculous as a grape so large it takes two to carry it.

Pardes suggests that Bradford references the Bible to justify the community’s actions and to “familiarize the strange world they had discovered”.<sup>449</sup> This would imply an attitude towards belief in the Bible that is instrumental and extrinsic. The intrinsic interpretation of Bradford’s use of the Bible in his writing of the “history” of the settlers would be to say that everything he experiences is brought into harmony with his religious worldviews, as it might indeed be the case that Bradford had a sincere belief that “correct” behaviour, derived from the biblical template, would either help or hinder progress towards heaven. It is likely that Bradford’s reading of the biblical passage contains elements of both an extrinsic, instrumental attitude and an intrinsic attitude, which views everything in light of one’s belief.

Throughout the text, Bradford stresses differences between his experience and his community and the biblical story to show that the biblical references were not only employed to justify and familiarise, but also to construct an

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid., 63–64.

<sup>449</sup> Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel*, 110.

identity of being chosen. Bradford does more than just pointing out the parallel of “chosen” emissaries finding food in a Promised Land and returning to their community to show it. He disregards discontinuities, and implicitly claims the divine sanction of the settling of the land, likening the Pilgrims to the Israelites, a “chosen” people. But just like the citation from the end of Chapter 9 of *Of Plymouth Plantation* implied a certain moral superiority to the Israelites, the fact that the community to which the Pilgrim spies return are “marvelously glad, and their hearts encouraged” signals that Bradford wants the Pilgrims to be seen as consciously appreciative of divine favour.

The Israelites are ready to reject the gift of the Promised Land and they rebel against YHWH. The Puritans adhere to the biblical ideology of progress towards the Promised Land, be it a geographical space or heaven, the ultimate Puritan utopia. Just as the Bible employs the resident tribes as a device to establish its ideology of right and wrong when it comes to achieving the divinely promised utopia, the Pilgrims do not see the Native Nations of Cape Cod as more than a divinely sent food cultivator to aid them in their progress towards utopia. Those outside of the “chosen” group do not come into view as anything but either an inconvenient challenge to achieving utopia or a convenient helper on the “chosen” community’s progress towards it.

Cotton Mather takes Bradford’s initial work on Numbers 13 and continues working with the text of Numbers 13 and Bradford’s reading of it. Mather provides the first step to introduce Bradford’s re-reading and re-working into majority history-writing. In this way, Numbers 13 with all its implications can leave the sphere of the initial “committed” reading, turn into “history”, and become “meaningful outside a closed circle of religionists huddled around their scripture”, by “[entering] the surrounding social world through those religionists.”<sup>450</sup>

#### **5.4. Cotton Mather reads Bradford and Numbers 13**

In Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana* of 1702 we find direct references to America as a Promised Land, to Numbers 13, to the wilderness

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<sup>450</sup> Bielo, *Words Upon the Word: An Ethnography of Evangelical Group Bible Study*, 14.

wanderings of the Israelites, and to Bradford. Similar re-working of Bible and reality takes place, and we find the same as strategy as in Bradford of distancing one's own community slightly from biblical templates to stress one's own chosen status, only that in Mather's reading, Bradford's account has become a foundation myth.

The following description of the history of Cape Cod by Mather includes a direct reference to Numbers 13 and an implicit reference to the biblical vision of an unnaturally tamed nature (Isa 11:6-8):

On this Cape, and on the Islands to the southward of it, he [Bartholomew Gosnold, 1585] found such a comfortable entertainment from the summer fruits of the earth, as well as from the wild creatures then ranging the woods, and from the wilder people now surprised into courtesie, that he carried back to England a report of the country, better than what the spies once gave of the land flowing with milk and honey.<sup>451</sup>

Mather retells Bradford's stories about the *Mayflower* and *Speedwell*. The ships landed at Cape Cod, because

their neighbours in Holland having a mind themselves to settle a plantation there, secretly and sinfully contracted with the master of the ship, employed for the transportation of these our English exiles, by a more northerly course, to put a trick upon them.<sup>452</sup>

The ships land at Cape Cod, instead of the Hudson River, but Mather turns this into yet another divine sign: "The most crooked way that ever was gone, even that of Israel's peregrination through the wilderness, may be called a right way, such was the way of this little Israel, now going into a wilderness."<sup>453</sup>

We have here another direct comparison of the story/history of the *Mayflower* in terms of the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites. The links are established by referring to the passengers of the *Mayflower* as exiles and "little Israel," making their neighbours in Holland seem malevolent (possibly Exodus Pharaoh-like), and referencing the wilderness wanderings. However, the wanderings of the passengers of the *Mayflower* and *Speedwell* are not due to sinful behaviour as were the Israelites' but are

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<sup>451</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: Or, The Ecclesiastical History of New-England*, 44.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, 50–51.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

presented as divine providence. Mather actually turns the false landing at Cape Cod into a god-given occurrence: the Pilgrims are not punished for a sin, rather they are saved by divine intervention from attacks by Indians:

Had they been carried, according to their desire unto Hudson's River, the Indians in those parts were at this time so many, and so mighty, and so sturdy, that in probability all this little feeble number of Christians had been massacred by these bloody salvages, as not long after some others were: whereas the good hand of God now brought them to a country wonderfully prepared for their entertainment, by a sweeping mortality that had lately been among the natives.<sup>454</sup>

This idea of divine providence also links the “emptying” of the land of the Native Nations to God, similar to YHWH's biblical promise to eradicate the resident tribes from the land of Canaan.<sup>455</sup> There is a similar tendency as I have observed in Bradford's writing to characterise one's own community as more virtuous than the biblical Israelites. Mather inserts divine providence and intervention into historical events (at the time of his writing already in the past and part of history) that might otherwise seem to be setbacks or errors in planning.

Mather briefly recounts the story reported in Bradford's account.

Yet these expeditions on discovery had this one remarkable smile of Heaven upon them; that being made before the snow covered the ground, they met with some Indian Corn; for which 'twas their purpose honestly to pay the natives on demand [...].<sup>456</sup>

Mather seems to smoothen over the theft of the corn by paraphrasing the circumstances reported by Bradford into a more passive sounding “they met with some Indian corn”, rather than using words such as “taking” or “finding”. Again, the incident is portrayed as a divine favour to the community.

### 5.5. *Bradford's estranged biblical utopia*

In summary: Bradford portrays a biblically inspired reality. This is made possible by a certain outlook on the Bible specific to Bradford's background and

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>455</sup> For example in Ex 23:30.

<sup>456</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: Or, The Ecclesiastical History of New-England*, 53.

beliefs which may not have come about in other situations and by other interpreters/readers in the same way. His reading may be inspired by a sincere belief in his own chosen-ness and a sincere fear that personal salvation is at stake when behaving “correctly” in this revisited biblical story of progress. It is important to note that the Bible is available to him not so much as an unchanging literal blueprint but as a text that has relevance to reality by being able to be shaped around reality. In this way, it behaves like some utopias might: it is used by Bradford as a mirror that has the potential to reflect reality, even if it does not do so literally.

The juxtaposition of reality and text makes an inconsistency visible to the reader-believer (Suvin’s cognitive estrangement): the Israelites are punished by their god on their way to their Promised Land so Bradford portrays his community as less rebellious and more consciously appreciative of divine favour than the dystopian spies of the biblical story. The resident tribes do not come into view. The biblical story is mapped onto reality, but because it is inconsistent with Bradford’s reality it inspires him to act upon the realisation of the inconsistency.

The Bible is part of a constructed idea of progress that extends beyond a mere literal repetition of biblical stories. Mather, writing two generations after Bradford, repeats the stories found in Bradford, makes them part of this history-writing of the “history” of New England as the Promised Land, and adds to the construction of Bradford as a Moses-like figure. Bradford’s coping strategy is to tweak reality to align it a little bit more with a biblical story, but at the same time to stress the superior position of his community. This might be a response to a utopia. Mather continues the cultural work on Bradford’s text and draws the response to utopia into history.

In this way, one reader-believer’s response to the utopia of the Promised Land as found in the Bible becomes majority history-writing. The Bible is taken to be a relevant utopia – one that inspires action, not only a heuristic game which contemplates inconsistencies between reality and a fictional place. The problem here is that the utopia or dystopia that is featured in the Bible hinges on the presence of and the reaction to a native people that is interpreted by the reader-believer as a divinely sent obstacle that needs to be overcome.

A dystopia might sketch an image of a society in which one latent tendency of reality is brought to its exaggerated conclusion. The dystopia might thereby seek to encourage readers to avoid the development of this latent tendency and take action to avoid the coming about of the dystopian circumstances. Two sides clash in Numbers 13: the longing for a Promised Land in addition to the longing for dominance and liberation, and the dystopian side of violent conflict with those who are being conquered. The dystopian side of Numbers 13 contains the story about ten disobedient spies, who advocate leaving the Native Nations alone. In Bradford's interpretation this might be a latent tendency he finds in his reality, which needs to be overcome. In this sense, he interprets the dystopian side of Numbers 13 "correctly". The utopia feels close enough: New England as a Promised Land with abundant food supply.

The dystopian elements, as in the biblical template, are merely divinely sent obstacles<sup>457</sup> which give the community a chance to demonstrate how much more chosen they are than the Israelites. It is an example of what Atwood writes about: "[...] most utopias viewed slantwise – from the point of view of people who don't fit into their high standards of perfection – are equally dire [as dystopias]." <sup>458</sup> Only that in these texts – the Bible, Bradford, Mather – we are not dealing with clearly recognisable fictions but with texts that purport to portray reality. <sup>459</sup>

Since biblical utopias are especially likely to be applied, interpreted, and brought into someone's reality, it is important to discuss whether a utopia is fully understandable only if one is very familiar with its historical background, and may even stir the most reaction only if utopia and reader are roughly contemporary. I would answer the first part relatively: it depends on the reader and what the reader can perceive and wants to perceive in a text, whether it is recognised as a utopia.

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<sup>457</sup> "For the Puritan the Indian as well as himself was part of the cosmic drama willed by God to reveal His sovereignty and His grace." Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*, (New York: Knopf, 1978), 81.

<sup>458</sup> Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 66–67.

<sup>459</sup> Bradford's account found in *Of Plymouth Plantation* is appropriated and retold until today as the story of the "First Thanksgiving" in the United States. To draw attention to the perpetuation of this "history according to the conqueror", Thanksgiving in the U.S. has been observed since the 1970's as National Day of Mourning or Un-thanksgiving Day by some.

Whether a utopia inspires more of a reaction if utopia and reader are contemporary I would answer negatively with regard to most utopias that are not part of somebody's authoritative religious canon. One might conjecture that hardly anyone would advocate applying societal changes described in Thomas More's *Utopia* literally.

Whether the more abstract utopian impulse inspires people to take action in their reality is a different question which deals with a more abstract concept of utopia than one concrete utopian text. One of the crucial differences between biblical utopias and secular utopias is that by being thought of by some believers throughout different historical eras as applicable to every reality and eternally meaningful, the biblical texts have a different impact on a believer's perspective on a biblical text's applicability in reality. The stakes for a "committed" reader are high.

We must exercise "epistemological suspicion"<sup>460</sup> when reading the reader. Reading the reader, one may stumble across one's own suspicions and interpret the use of the Bible by a "committed" reader cynically as an instrumental use to justify petty crimes and gain personal advantage. However, we must take into account the possibility that a "committed" reader's interpretation is inspired by a very real fear that "incorrect" behaviour or interpretation may bring about personal suffering.

Bradford's reading of the Bible is similar to somebody reading a utopia, realising that it is a juxtaposition of two worlds – text-world and reality – but attributing enough realistic potential to the text-world to decide to bring about its utopian potential, while avoiding bringing about the potential dystopia of which the text warns. Bradford, however, does not read the Bible as a historical utopia, especially relevant at a specific time to a specific community, but as directly relevant to the experience of his reality and his personal salvation, which requires some tweaks and changes to fit a worldview of chosen-ness and progress towards heaven. In the process of interpretation the utopian and dystopian potentials of Numbers 13 appear very clearly to the reader of the reader.

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<sup>460</sup> Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 7.

## 6. Utopia and Dystopia in Numbers 13

### *Chapter summary*

After reading texts by readers of Numbers 13 who consider themselves “chosen”, this chapter seeks to explore the link between utopia and dystopia in theoretical terms, all in the interest of furthering the construction of the warning label that states that behind a (biblical) utopia there lurks an implicit dystopia, especially if the utopia is attempted to be brought into reality. In theoretical terms, while a utopia may be or may have been a heuristic device to draw attention to issues contemporary to the time of the utopia’s composition, biblical utopias contain the potential of being understood as literal instructions for achieving utopia and avoiding dystopia.

To demonstrate where the dystopia lies within the utopia of Numbers 13, I will return to the passage to stress the utopian and dystopian interplay, which is an expected feature of any literary utopia. I will uncover the dystopian content by relying on dystopian theory and show the ideal typical family resemblances between, for example, slave narratives and the implicit secondary story found in Numbers 13. The biblical text uses the vehicle of fantastic elements (giants or monsters, for example) to convey a dystopian side of the story. This chapter ends with an excursus that seeks to explore further the family resemblances between the biblical story, its readers, and modern conventions in fantasy and horror genres, and concludes that the presence of the dystopian side of Numbers 13 is another feature that makes this passage utopian.

### **6.1. *Relations between utopia, dystopia, anti-utopia***

I summarise definitions of the genres appropriate to my discussion below, giving a relational overview of how utopia, dystopia, and anti-utopia relate to each other. This will allow the utopian, dystopian, and anti-utopian images that are



analysed to be placed within this relational framework. Although I am tracing family resemblances with modern genres in the biblical case study passage, not attempting to argue to have found an example of a genre in the Bible, I add a comment on genre and form criticism in section 6.1.4.

### **6.1.1. Utopia**

Utopia is generally seen to be a fictional vision of a world significantly better than the author's empirical environment. Suvin's definition of utopia is helpful:

Utopia is the verbal construction of a quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on the estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis.<sup>461</sup>

I would like to supplement Suvin's definition with Roemer's definition, which is:

A literary utopia is a fairly detailed description of an imaginary community, society, or world – a “fiction” that encourages readers to experience vicariously a culture that represents a prescriptive, normative alternative to their own culture.<sup>462</sup>

Roemer's definition mentions the effect the utopia may have on a reader. Thus Roemer's definition helps to locate the creation of an effect of estrangement between the fictional world of the text and the reader, as well as changing readerships. These definitions are used as close descriptions of what I would call the ideal type of utopia. Other definitions work in their specific contexts and are no less appropriate.

### **6.1.2. Dystopia**

The rise of literary dystopias, including the first use of the term, occurs in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, coinciding with industrialisation and automatisisation.<sup>463</sup> The

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<sup>461</sup> Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 49.

<sup>462</sup> Roemer, *America as Utopia*, 3.

<sup>463</sup> “In the twentieth century, the dark side of Utopia – dystopian accounts of places worse than the ones we live in – took its place in the narrative catalogue of the West and developed in several forms throughout the rest of the century. No doubt prompted by H.G. Wells's science fictional visions of modernity, a number of other works – E.M. Forster's story ‘The Machine

Bible was produced in a pre-modern, pre-industrial context. Compared to a modern reader, its intended readers would have approached the text with different fears and a different historical awareness. Uncritically applying the term dystopia and the explanation of its popularity from the late 19<sup>th</sup> until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century to the Bible is an anachronistic mistake.

However, I am a reader approaching the biblical text with an early 21<sup>st</sup> century awareness of the failed utopias of the past, including the dystopian outcomes of supposedly utopian political regimes. I am aware of many pieces from the corpus of dystopian literature available, therefore it is possible to make comparisons and establish connections. The concern here is not so much to look back upon a biblical past but to gauge the possible trajectories that the biblical text can have in the present or in the future (hence also my discussion of the Bible as being understandable in today's and tomorrow's world as science fiction in the following chapter).

Especially with regard to dystopia, in the strictest sense, we have to be aware that it will take a post-19<sup>th</sup> century reader to even recognise the stock motifs of this genre. The term dystopia, according to the OED,<sup>464</sup> was first used in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to describe the opposite of utopia: a place or society, in which circumstances are fundamentally worse, not better.

As Sargent points out, dystopian elements can be found in a variety of other categories linked to utopia, such as "flawed utopia" or "critical utopia". He observes that

[flawed utopia] fits two categories of works. The first is more numerous and shows the ultimately dystopian nature of apparent perfection. Within this subset, a common trope is to demonstrate that the reason/perfection of computers/machines is anti-human. The other category, which is the focus of this essay, poses the fundamental dilemma of what cost we are willing to pay or require others to pay to achieve a good life.<sup>465</sup>

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Stops' and, more famously, works such as Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – came to represent the *classical*, or canonical, form of dystopia." Moylan and Baccolini, *Dark Horizons*, 1.

<sup>464</sup> The OED reports the term's first use by John Stuart Mill in a speech in 1868, but in 1952, G. Negley and J. Max Patrick wrote in *Quest for Utopia* (xvii, 298): "The *Mundus Alter et Idem* [of Joseph Hall] is [...] the opposite of *eutopia*, the ideal society: it is a *dystopia*, if it is permissible to coin a word." *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).

<sup>465</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Problem of the 'Flawed Utopia': A Note on the Cost of Eutopia," in *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (London: Routledge, 2003), 226.

Putting my urge to critique Sargent's eagerness to categorise aside for the moment, what can be clearly seen from this statement is that such dystopian tropes, which show the "dystopian nature of apparent perfection" and are linked to a certain fear of mechanical or computerised perfection, would indeed only be possible after industrialisation. The second of Sargent's categories poses an essentially utilitarian question, which would have been possible to ask even before industrialisation.

A family resemblance to dystopias can be seen in texts which address a situation of coercion not necessarily directly linked to industrialisation or mechanisation. Maria Varsam argues that there are distinct parallels between slave narratives and dystopian writings.<sup>466</sup> Slave narratives (or texts that bear very close family resemblances) are present in the Bible. In these stories dystopian traits can be seen even before the common dystopian themes of dehumanisation due to mechanisation or computers could have become popular. The element of dehumanisation is present in slave narratives, but it is the dehumanisation of humans by humans – not by machines or computers.

When themes such as loss of free will or loss of agency, as well as questions of self and other appear, some themes can be called dystopian or proto-dystopian, even in the Bible. It is important, especially when speaking of dystopia, to be aware of the anachronism. It takes a post-industrialisation reader to call these images dystopian, but dismissing the observation that images of dehumanisation, slavery, and coercion (dystopian tropes) are present in the Bible and available as blueprints for hypothetical committed readers, would be to derail an important conversation about the precarious potential of the Bible.

### **6.1.3. Anti-utopia**

There is a difference between anti-utopia and dystopia. It will become helpful to differentiate between dystopia and anti-utopia below, when I am discussing different levels of affinity to utopia, dystopia and anti-utopia found in Numbers 13 on narrator, character, and audience level. Anti-utopias are a critique of the utopian impulse and of utopias and their writers. They want to alert to issues such as the possibility of utopia turning into totalitarianism if enforced in reality,

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<sup>466</sup> Varsam, "Concrete Dystopia: Slavery and Its Others."

or that too much wishful thinking in utopias and an exclusive focus on a critique of the present in both utopia and dystopia can lead to neglecting the transformative potential of utopias.<sup>467</sup> As such anti-utopian thought is a modern phenomenon too, which can only arise in response to utopias and utopian thought. Since I will argue that we can detect anti-utopian family resemblances in the behaviour of the characters of the biblical case study, I will briefly outline here what differentiates an anti-utopia from a dystopia.

Some dystopias could be called anti-utopian, if their writer sought specifically to criticise utopia. Pfaelzer surveys three works that would seem to fit this particular stance.<sup>468</sup> The novels Pfaelzer describes are parodies of utopias, containing familiar utopian elements but exaggerating them to show the unviability of utopias. Pfaelzer calls these anti-utopian novels dystopias. She says that the subject matter of dystopia “is the phenomenon of utopianism itself, its literary and political assertion that we can conceive of a future different from and better than the present.”<sup>469</sup> I disagree with Pfaelzer’s use of the term dystopia to refer to novels that seek to criticise utopias by offering a utopian satire or parody. The dystopian impulse is actually very similar to the utopian one and not a critique of utopia; both extrapolate from a given reality to let the reader (returning to Roemer’s definition) experience vicariously a possible alternative world, either to endorse an idea (utopia) or to warn of tendencies seen in reality (dystopia). Anti-utopias would aim to criticise and reject altogether this technique of constructing hypothetical alternate worlds to contrast a given reality.

#### **6.1.4. Form criticism and treatment of “genre” in this chapter**

As mentioned in my introduction, the contribution here is not to demonstrate the presence of a modern genre in the Bible nor is it to prove the presence of ancient genres within Numbers 13. The ideal typical or family resemblance approach to definitions aims to show that by reading a text informed by what we know about

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<sup>467</sup> This is main issue discussed in Levitas and Sargisson, “Utopia in Dark Times: Optimism/Pessimism and Utopia/Dystopia,” 16.

<sup>468</sup> The three examples are *The Republic of the Future: or, Socialism a Reality* (1887) by Anna Bowman Dodd, *Looking Further Backward* (1890) by Arthur Dudley Vinton, and *The Isle of Feminine* (1893) by Charles Elliot Niswonger. Pfaelzer, *The Utopian Novel in America*.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 94.

a certain phenomenon (here, utopia and dystopia), new dimensions of an old text will come into view, for example the dystopian side of Number 13.

Having compiled enough evidence I have said that Numbers 13 is utopian. (We have the word in today's world, we might as well use it.) In some sense, what is done here links in with form criticism:

Form criticism may be characterized as the study of patterns of speech in relation to their roles in human life. More specifically, it deals with types of complete units of expression, although one should recognize that the limits of a unit are to some extent ambiguous.<sup>470</sup>

The ambiguity of Numbers 13 has slipped into focus from the beginning: it is both locative *and* utopian, its committed readers Bradford and Mather exercised some textual work to highlight one side of the (at least) two sides that are present, it contains maps but is not found in reality. Below I will assess the dystopian and utopian ambiguity.

Rather than pointing out where the boundaries of units of expression are (my unit is arbitrary: a biblical chapter), the focus here is very much on their relation to human life. However, the case study of Numbers 13 is *not* put into a relationship with the lives of biblical writers or members of a late Persian period community but with the lives of biblical scholars, Puritan pilgrims, and Trekkies. What is hopefully becoming apparent and will hopefully be perfectly apparent at the very end of this thesis is that I am convinced that the relations such patterns of speech have with human lives are not stable but fluctuate. I have found that arbitrary categorisations and synchronic definitions do not help to gauge a fluctuating phenomenon. In some sense my observations do depend on the identification of *topoi*.<sup>471</sup> However, they are not seen as monolithic.<sup>472</sup>

"A major remaining task of OT form criticism is to examine closely the relation of content, as well as of style, to the various aspects of life, with the

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<sup>470</sup> Martin J. Buss, "The Study of Forms," in *Old Testament Form Criticism*, ed. John H. Hayes (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1974), 1.

<sup>471</sup> "Recurring elements of thought became known as *topoi*." Ibid., 6.

<sup>472</sup> "Jewish and Christian exegetes learned extensively from established rhetorical and poetic theory. They rarely did so slavishly, however; attempts were made to create special categories for biblical material when that seemed necessary or appropriate. Neither the borrowing nor the originating of concepts appears always successful in hindsight, but is it otherwise in modern scholarship?" Ibid., 11.

hope of providing analogies for the present.”<sup>473</sup> Here analogies of the present are brought to *topoi* found in the Bible, which will then draw analogies for the present out of the text again. It is not the goal, however, to find a “relatively simple classification system for the handling of complex data.”<sup>474</sup> The data – the biblical text (in today’s world and in conjunction with its readers) – is complex for a reason: it negotiated and continues to negotiate complicated issues of ethics, belief, self and other, territory, and law. My goal is not to propose yet another classification system, as stressed from the beginning.

If “[...] form criticism is best taken as dealing primarily with fairly general aspects, rather than with irrational particularities,”<sup>475</sup> it is not quite what is being done here. Particularly chapter 7 on science fiction deals with irrational particularities of the case study scene. Although there appear to be many convergences with the description of form criticism given, Weber’s advocating the ideal type as a methodological strategy to encounter complex phenomena was chosen over an approach that favours generalisation or categorisation. In this sense, I use the term genre in the interest of intelligibility. “Genre” is understood (even if not made explicit every time) to be a relatively arbitrary category.

## 6.2. *Ambiguous utopian and dystopian images in Numbers 13*

David Clines refers to “reading against the grain”, when turning around a biblical story in order to explore it from the perspective of the non-protagonist.<sup>476</sup> The utopian and dystopian reading of Numbers 13 offered here certainly exhibits a family resemblance to a “reading against the grain”, though using utopia and dystopia as its perspective focuses on multi-directional readings: not just “against” and “with”, but also circular, undulating and simultaneous.

Numbers 13 contains the utopian motif of a journey to a place and a return to report on the circumstances and environment found there. The passage’s theme bears family resemblance to the structure of classical literary utopias.

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<sup>473</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

<sup>476</sup> Clines, *Interested Parties*, 191.

Some theoretical observations about utopias are applicable to it, such as the inclusion of a map equivalent, which is difficult to render graphically and testifies to the portrayal of a fictional place in the text rather than an empirical environment.

In addition to being structurally similar to literary utopias there are utopian motifs, such as the land being described as “flowing with milk and honey”, which is recognisable to a post-medieval reader as a *Land of Cockayne* type image, and the fantastically large cluster of grapes harvested by the passage’s protagonists, which is an image of a place offering up its produce without human efforts in agriculture. Subsistence is guaranteed in this utopia, just like in the utopian prototype of the Garden of Eden, where humans are welcome to eat (mostly) everything, which to the modern-day reader might seem like a literary utopia in which even the modern anti-utopian arguments of exploitation of natural resources<sup>477</sup> could be dismissed.

Within Numbers 13 the dystopian appears in addition to the utopian, especially in the report of the deviant spies. Their report mentions the land being inhabited by Nephilim, in comparison to whom the spies feel as small as grasshoppers (Num 13:33), and it describes the land as devouring its inhabitants (Num 13:32). At first sight the oscillations between utopia and dystopia we find in this passage establish two groups, which are used to demonstrate which approach to the conquest of the Promised Land is favoured. The spies who slander the utopia are punished by not reaching utopia, whereas those two spies who do not slander the Promised Land lead the eventual conquest.

While Numbers 13 shows some traits of utopia and dystopia, it also bears a strong family resemblance to conquest, discovery, and migration literature, much of which attempts to locate utopia or paradise in exotic places. There is a convergence of themes. Utopias and dystopias are concerned with projecting images of ideal or non-ideal societies into a fictional space, thereby juxtaposing an implied reality with a fictional society. Within this fictional place an encounter with a fictional Other<sup>478</sup> can be played out to shed light on or to test

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<sup>477</sup> As found, for example, in Jonas, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*.

<sup>478</sup> I have chosen this term carefully and chosen to capitalise it to show this. I am aware of some recent protest against using the term “Other” to describe the “not-yourself”, or the stranger, because from the perspective of this supposed “Other” – if it is a human being or a community of human beings – it is obviously dehumanising and objectifying. However, I am using the possible

one's own identity. Migration, conquest, or discovery literature combines the theme of a newfound sometimes paradisiacal land and the theme of the encounter with the Other in that land, and ultimately says more about one's own identity and worldview, than about the identity of the Other described in such texts. Numbers 13 describes a spying mission in preparation for the divinely led conquest of Utopia.

### **6.2.1. Fortified cities are an asset and a threat**

The spies report that the cities they see in Canaan are large and fortified (Num 13:28). This is contrasted with the preceding statement that the land flows with milk and honey (Num 13:27). The fortified cities can be read as a utopian and a dystopian motif at the same time. If the cities can be successfully conquered, they would be an asset. If they are held by a powerful rival or enemy they are a threat. The fortified cities are the first example of how dystopia can become utopia in Numbers 13, depending on whether the protagonist community controls the city or the antagonist community controls it.

### **6.2.2. The land eats the protagonists and the protagonists eat their rivals**

Not just the cities can be interpreted as a utopian *and* dystopian motif. The same is true for the comment delivered by the dystopian spies about the land eating its inhabitants. The eating land is a strong othering trope, expressing fear of the stranger and fear of the loss of identity if read as a potential reference to cannibalism:<sup>479</sup> “The fear of cannibalism hovers over the travel account of the spies as well. The land as a whole is described as a cannibalistic (m)other who swallows up her children.”<sup>480</sup>

The recurring theme of fear of cannibalism in conquest narratives has been interpreted as a symbol of the fear of being assimilated, literally eaten up, by a

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alternative term “stranger” in Georg Simmel’s sense as somebody who makes an essentially positive contribution to a community of which she or he is not a member. Sometimes I may use “Other” interchangeably with “absolute stranger” to express that from the point of view of a cohesive community, the encounter with this absolute stranger or Other has a significant impact on the negotiation of one’s own identity.

<sup>479</sup> “Accusations of cannibalism contributed to the de-humanisation of the outsider, for men who ate other men were never thought to be quite human.” Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man*, 81.

<sup>480</sup> Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel*, 112.



stranger.<sup>481</sup> Utopias depict transformations of a society, but the desired utopian transformation is not the transformation into the Other. The phrase “a land that eats its inhabitants” has been interpreted as referring to disease, cannibalism, burials, or warfare. None of these are positive attributes. Since the attribute is attached to the land rather than to a specific group of people the reference to a “land that eats its inhabitants” can be reversed into the positive from the protagonists’ perspective. If the protagonist group took possession of this land “that eats”, then the successful conquerors will not have to fight strangers anymore; in the utopian future strangers will just be assimilated since this is one of the properties of the land.

I agree with Ilana Pardes that “a land that eats its inhabitants” is a cannibalistic image. It also carries clear implications about dominance and victory, if one argued by analogy to Numbers 14:9, where Joshua and Caleb try to calm the people, saying, “and don’t fear the people of the land, for they are our bread”. Many commentators do not comment upon the cannibalistic dimension definitely present in the use of the Hebrew verb root *’kl* (אכל) in Numbers 13:32 and the noun *lehem* (with suffix in Num 14:9 לחמנו). Frequently, this phrase of Numbers 13:32 is explained as referring to war.<sup>482</sup>

Numbers 13 and surrounding passages abound in references to eating and being eaten. In Numbers 11 a plague is brought about by YHWH because rebellious members of the community complain about food; in Numbers 13 the Promised Land is described as eating its inhabitants; in Numbers 14:9 Caleb and Joshua predict that foreign tribes will be the Israelites’ “bread”; in Numbers 16:32 the earth swallows rebellious Korah. The cannibalistic earth<sup>483</sup> – though not the Promised Land yet – makes Korah disappear from the community. Korah and all that belongs to him “disappeared from the midst of the

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<sup>481</sup> Greenblatt sees conquest as a particular form of cannibalism: “The possession need not be personal – Bernal Diaz professes to have acquired very little for himself from his adventures – but the enterprise in which he serves is fanatically dedicated to swallowing the whole vast land mass and all of its peoples. Theirs was the greatest experiment in political, economic, and cultural cannibalism in the history of the Western world.” Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 136.

<sup>482</sup> Noth says the phrase refers to “warlike dissensions” in Noth, *Numbers*, 107. Milgrom offers another interpretation of this phrase, which is “usually explained as a reference to the land’s infertility” in Milgrom, *Torah Commentary*, 106. Milgrom also suggests that the eating land might be an image of war, *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>483</sup> The earth has a “mouth” – *ph* in Gen 4:11, too. The swallowing by the earth of Dathan and Abiram is recounted in Ps 106:17. In the NT the earth opens its mouth in Rev 12:16.

congregation” (Num 16:33).<sup>484</sup> After being swallowed alive nothing remains of Korah, neither his family nor his belongings. The remaining rebels are consumed by fire and their fire pans have to be removed from the “charred remains” (Num 17:3); Korah, on the other hand, disappears without a trace of remains. This cannibalistic earth leaves no trace of a former identity.

In addition to being a dehumanising othering trope, the fear of being eaten alive, according to Pardes and the scholars she cites, implies a fear of losing one’s identity in the encounter with an absolute stranger. Pardes establishes an interesting parallel between the eating land of Numbers 13 and accounts in discovery and conquest literature from the Renaissance onwards:

The most powerful fantasy, however, operative in all early encounters in the New World, was cannibalism. In part, it was a matter of misinterpreting different eating habits and unfamiliar non-Christian religious rituals, but it also had to do with a more primary anxiety about losing one’s identity in the other.<sup>485</sup>

The image evoked by the biblical references to the eating earth or the idea of an enemy being “bread” for oneself is certainly reminiscent of such issues of seeing one’s own identity threatened in an encounter with the Other. This side of the trope may be more suitable for a discussion informed by postcolonial theory, contrasting biblical images of eating or being eaten with discovery or encounter-literature that also features the trope.

### **6.2.3. Giant grapes might be giants’ grapes**

Even the generally positive image of the big grape cluster – at first sight testifying to the excellent quality of the land – can be turned into a dystopian vision. Rashi’s commentary on the passage expresses this idea. Since the land’s fruit is different, we can assume that the land’s inhabitants are unusual as well.<sup>486</sup> The cluster of grapes appears to be unusually large, and the Anakites, identified with the Nephilim here, could be understood to be analogously large and threatening.

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<sup>484</sup> Hebrew וַיִּאָכְלוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַקֵּהָל. The verb root *’bd* carries a meaning of “lost”: Korah and all that belonged to him were – in a sense – lost to the community.

<sup>485</sup> Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel*, 112.

<sup>486</sup> Rashi and Herczeg, *The Torah, with Rashi’s Commentary: Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated by Y.I.Z. Herczeg*, 153.

The Anakites are mentioned in the narrative about the route of the spies (v. 22), a second time in the list of tribes found in the land (v. 28), and again as a part of the slandering report (v. 33), where they become a dystopian feature by being associated with the Nephilim.

These supposed giants can be read in more than one way, too, contributing either to the dystopian fear inducing image of the land as one that will crush the would-be conquerors, but it could also evoke a positive association with an antediluvian world, implying that the Promised Land is indeed in the vicinity of the Garden of Eden.

#### **6.2.4. The theme of escaping coercion**

Cannibalism is a quasi-dystopian trope that can be employed to dehumanise an Other or to express a fear of losing one's identity – “being eaten”. It has been explicitly linked to the experience of slavery. Slave narratives have been compared to dystopian narratives.<sup>487</sup> Slavery and dystopias have themes in common, such as obtaining freedom, control of one's own body, or control of reproductive choices, and slavery is described by those who have experienced it as a sort of cannibalism that eats not only flesh and bone but one's very substance of identity.<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> Varsam, “Concrete Dystopia: Slavery and Its Others.”

<sup>488</sup> I am grateful to Robert Beckford, who pointed this connection out in a talk entitled “Is the Black Church in Britain Bewitched by Colonial Christianity?” given at the University of Derby in May 2013. The metaphorical and physical connections between slavery and cannibalism are described for example by Olaudah Equiano in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*: “The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled and tossed up to see if I were sound by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke, (which was very different from any I had ever heard) united to confirm me in this belief. Indeed such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment, that, if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with that of the meanest slave in my own country. When I looked round the ship too and saw a large furnace or copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. When I recovered a little I found some black people about me, who I believed were some of those who brought me on board, and had been receiving their pay; they talked to me in order to cheer me, but all in vain. I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and loose hair.” Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, n.d., [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15399/15399-h/15399-h.htm#CHAP\\_II](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15399/15399-h/15399-h.htm#CHAP_II). Accessed August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

Slavery is not a foregrounded theme in Numbers 13, but it does come into view if one considers the threshold situation of Numbers 13 as a mirror to the slavery situation of Egypt and in conjunction with the fear of the Other expressed through the metaphor of cannibalism. In Numbers 13, it is as yet not clear whether the future will hold a change towards a utopia in which coercion is absent for the first time and the Israelites' distinctive culture can be fully performed.

The dystopian outcome the majority of the spies warn of is a mirror-situation to the one in Egypt, in which the community enters another situation of cultural non-dominance or slavery. If history as told in the Bible progressed in mirrors, not cycles, Numbers 13 holds either a chance of return into slavery or a chance of return to a quasi-Eden. The idea of the mirror image is very fitting here. The fear of slavery is reflected back from the Promised Land especially by the presence of the strong tribes and the phrase "a land that eats".

Suvín writes about the presence of mirror images in William Morris' utopia *News from Nowhere*:

[...] all characters are mirror-images of the narrator (Old Hammond) or of the landscape, and all elements of the story a system of stylistic mirrors, which would easily become tedious were it not for the fundamental existential estrangement and opposition between Nowhere and England, the twenty-first and the nineteenth century, light and soot, summer and winter, sunlight and moonlight.<sup>489</sup>

In Morris, according to Suvín, we have a utopia that relies on mirror images to contrast the differences between a current situation and the utopian situation. The threshold situation in Numbers 13 might be a mirror that can go either way: it can either reflect the Garden of Eden or Egyptian captivity.

Varsam writes: "Where concrete utopia envisions freedom from violence, inequality and domination, concrete dystopia expresses coercion (physical and psychological), fear, despair, and alienation."<sup>490</sup> This explains quite well what I mean by the mirror and how it can contain both a utopian and a dystopian outcome. It can either be a mirror that flips around the fear of coercion into

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<sup>489</sup> Darko Suvín, "Anticipating the Sunburst - Dream and Vision: The Exemplary Case of Bellamy and Morris," in *America as Utopia*, ed. Kenneth M. Roemer (New York: Burt Franklin & Co, 1981), 69.

<sup>490</sup> Varsam, "Concrete Dystopia: Slavery and Its Others," 209.

freedom from violence or it can be a mirror that reflects back the same situation. Alienation and fear of coercion are both themes in Numbers 13, brought into the story by the dystopian spies.

The alienation might just be most clearly expressed in the statement of the fearful spies that they seemed like grasshoppers to themselves and the others (Num 13:33). Pardes views this statement cannibalistically too, saying that grasshoppers are, after all, a kosher insect.<sup>491</sup> There are cannibalistic associations there, of course, but the most concrete alien form that we physically share a world with might just be insects. If this were the case, the alienation of Numbers 13 might be found in this cypher.<sup>492</sup> Another motif that makes the Promised Land alien is the figures of giants purportedly present in Canaan.<sup>493</sup>

An interesting problem appears when one follows the theme of dissent or rebellion in dystopias, and then attempts to locate possible parallels between a potential biblical dystopian vision, such as the one of the hostile Promised Land, and modern dystopian writing. Varsam writes, “As any reader of dystopias knows, to rebel against the status quo, to refuse one’s slave status, results in certain death if escape or change is not accomplished.”<sup>494</sup> Many examples of dystopias come to mind in which rebellion becomes a central theme, and many others, in which dissent or rebellion is either absent (which creates a somewhat disturbing effect) or does not succeed.<sup>495</sup>

Rebellion against slave status happened in Egypt and death was escaped, change was accomplished. The end of the Exodus story is similar to the ending of more hopeful dystopias, in which the system is successfully overcome and hope for change towards the better remains, even if the ending is an open one. The biblical story continues and it makes sense to think of it as less rounded and less designed than a modern dystopian story, although I would argue, using

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<sup>491</sup> Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel*, 112.

<sup>492</sup> Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* is a famous example of a text that translates alienation (again the dystopian alienation experienced in industrialised modernity) into the literary figure of an insect.

<sup>493</sup> See both the fantasy excursus below and the chapter on SF and alien encounters for more on grasshoppers.

<sup>494</sup> Varsam, “Concrete Dystopia: Slavery and Its Others,” 212.

<sup>495</sup> Rebellion is a central theme in, e.g. *The Hunger Games* and other popular recent dystopias, such as Scott Westerfeld’s *Uglies* series, targeted at a young adult audience. Kurt Vonnegut’s *Player Piano* deals with the consequences of non-normative behaviour. Lloyd/Moore’s *V for Vendetta* ends on a hopeful note that rebellion will continue. Rebellion is unsuccessful in Huxley’s *Brave New World* and Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Rebellion is strikingly absent in Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*.

specifically Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as an example, that some modern dystopias are intended to continue in the thoughts and reactions they are meant to trigger in the reader. Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* concludes with an afterword, which implies that the dystopian regime has come to an end. Maybe, however, modern dystopias contain a warning that even the new utopia that arises after dystopia has ended, retains the potential of turning into a new dystopia.

Frye<sup>496</sup> and following him Davies<sup>497</sup> have spoken about waves in which the biblical story progresses: utopia is followed by dystopia, which is followed by a new utopia.<sup>498</sup> The biblical dystopian waves are at an interesting point if we locate Numbers 13 and look at it in isolation. Rebellion in Egypt was successful, with help from YHWH. Put with Varsam: rebellion was successful and death was escaped in the dystopia of slavery portrayed in Exodus. However, in the desert, under Moses as a human leader and YHWH as the actual leader, rebellion against the status quo brings about death as well. The ultimate dystopian threat when rebellion happens in the desert, now that Pharaoh is drowned – and it is possible to drown Pharaoh – is actually YHWH. The punishments for rebellion in Numbers are harsh and arbitrary.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Frye describes the progression of the biblical story waves of *mythoi*: a good state develops into a worse state and back to a good state within the story. Frye's "high points" are "the garden of Eden, the Promised Land, Jerusalem, and Mount Zion [...]," the low points are "wilderness", "Egypt" etc. Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 171.

<sup>497</sup> Davies, "The Bible: Utopian, Dystopian, or Neither? Or: Northrop Frye Meets Monty Python."

<sup>498</sup> "Frye's *Code* moves always towards fulfilment, resolution, perfection, being made up of a cycle in which each episode opens with promise and vision followed by complication and descent, and ending with redemption or resolution – which in turn prepares for the next wave." Davies, "The Bible: Utopian, Dystopian, or Neither? Or: Northrop Frye Meets Monty Python," 95–96.

<sup>499</sup> Unpredictability is an interesting dystopian motif with many family resemblances. We do not know the game rules in this utopia of the Promised-Land. The deviant spies are punished by not being allowed to enter the Promised Land, but so is Moses, who has not rebelled. The punishments we encounter in the book of Numbers alone are: a ravaging fire (Num 11:1), after people "complained bitterly"; a plague after people complain about food (Num 11:33); Miriam is struck with "white scales" and expelled from the camp for seven days for questioning Moses' exclusive right to prophetic leadership (Num 12:10); YHWH wants to strike the rebellious people with pestilence "and disown them" (Num 14:11); rebels are punished by not being included in the utopia of the Promised Land (Num 14:23); the dystopian spies of Num 13 are punished by death by plague (Num 14:37); those who decide to march against the Promised Land without being cued to do so by YHWH are defeated by Amalekites and Canaanites (Num 14:45); a man gathering wood on the Sabbath is stoned to death by the community since "[...] the Lord said to Moses 'The man shall be put to death: the whole community shall pelt him with stones outside the camp'" (Num 15:35); Korah is completely eradicated from the community for questioning Moses' exclusive authority (Num 16:32); those who are Korah's followers in this

If we look at the waves in which utopia and dystopia move in general, and then specifically in Numbers 13, it seems as though YHWH takes on a role of the leader who promises utopia to his people. There is a strong family resemblance to many leader-characters in contemporary dystopias. The ideology perpetuated in fictional dystopian systems is usually that if everyone followed the rules of the supposed utopian system, it would guarantee peace and happiness for everyone who is a member of that system. Those who dissent are punished.

In the desert, doubting divine provision and rebelling against one exclusive ruler are behaviours which are punished repeatedly. In Numbers 13 a new potential dystopian overlord comes into view (the foreign tribes) and the potential of entering another phase of non-dominance or coercion.

Eric Rabkin's test question to determine whether a text is more akin to utopia than to dystopia is: "Does the narrated world seem to have the author's approval?"<sup>500</sup> For Numbers 13 this question is difficult to answer and I have been steering clear of making assumptions about the authoring community based on the text. What seems to have the authors' approval is not so much the Promised Land itself as the idea that conquest is possible, though only with divine consent and support.

The reason YHWH is not easily recognisable as a dystopian leader type is probably the protagonist focus. As readers we are "with" those who agree that YHWH's system is utopia; we are "with" those who are rewarded by the system. If the story were told from the point of view of those who question the YHWH-system or were about to be either coerced into it or eradicated by it, the leader character would be distinctly dystopian, punishing opposition against his system arbitrarily.

In the stories about rebellion and punishment of Exodus-Numbers, there is the important dimension of how the text shapes a vicarious experience in the

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rebellion are punished by being burned (Num 16:35); plague for rebelling against Moses and Aaron (Num 17:12); Moses is not allowed to enter the Promised Land because "you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people" (Num 20:12); all those who follow Baal-Peor and had relations with Moabite women are to be impaled (25:4); a plague is checked because Phinehas stabs an Israelite as the Israelite is having sex with a Moabite woman (Num 25:8).

<sup>500</sup> Eric S. Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 142.

reader by focusing on specific heroic protagonists. By focussing on a specific group of protagonists, the narrative has some way of shaping the reader's identification with a protagonist group, here, the Israelites. The way the story is told, some readers will be able to "experience vicariously"<sup>501</sup> the world of the text.

However, it is possible that a reader might lose focus of the protagonist group, if she or he happens to identify with another group of characters more easily. For example, the "Canaanite" readings of these stories by Said and Warrior stress the perspective of the tribes of Canaan. From a gender perspective, Bible exegetes raise the question why in Numbers 12 only Miriam is punished but not Aaron, and question the gender politics of YHWH's utopian state.<sup>502</sup> In order for the story to unfold its utopian realistic potential, a reader would have to identify with the "chosen" Israelites (or consider themselves to be "more chosen", like William Bradford, as I have argued above).

The haunting two-sidedness of simultaneous utopia and dystopia becomes especially obvious if one does not read from a point of view that identifies particularly with the protagonists. In Numbers 14:2-3 the Israelites "rebel" against Moses by saying,

v. 2. "If only we had died in the land of Egypt or if we could only just die in this wilderness!

v. 3. For why does YHWH bring us to this land just to fall by the sword, our women and children will be kidnapped, would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

These community members get their wish and are sentenced to die in the wilderness. The new generation – without the memory of Egypt and hence without the option to long for a return<sup>503</sup> – enacts this fearsome scenario, bringing this dystopian situation upon others. For example, in Joshua 6:21: "They destroyed everything that was in the city, men and women, young people

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<sup>501</sup> Roemer, *America as Utopia*, 5.

<sup>502</sup> Naomi Graetz, *Unlocking the Garden: A Feminist Jewish Look at the Bible, Midrash, and God* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005). Especially Graetz' chapter "Did Miriam Talk Too Much?"

<sup>503</sup> The death of the Exodus generation also happens to eradicate what sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois calls "double consciousness", the awareness of one's distinctiveness and the awareness of one's minority position. YHWHism and the establishment of the utopian state under YHWH cannot allow the two-ness of "double consciousness".



and old people, and ox, sheep, and donkey, by the sword.” It is easy to see that this is the same story, made utopian or dystopian depending on which group kills and which group is killed.

### 6.3. *Utopia and dystopia exist at the same time*

Numbers 13 is not a clean utopia in which only a significantly better world is imagined. One might think that the presence of such themes as slavery, coercion, domination, and eradication would subtract from the credibility of claiming that Numbers 13 is a utopia. I will test the following assumption: utopia and dystopia exist at the same time, which is a definitive feature. It does not subtract from a story’s utopian-ness if dystopia can be located within it; it makes it even more utopian.

Theorists have suggested different ways of putting the seemingly opposed imagination of a significantly better place and the imagination of a significantly worse place into relationships. My conclusion will be that whether a text seems utopian or dystopian depends most significantly on the reader, her or his temporal placement, and individual background. In addition to this, it is certainly possible to locate a relationship between “better” and “worse” within the text.

The biblical utopia can hardly be included in a category of texts whose authors would have been able to consciously draw on the well-established genres of utopia and dystopia, and assess its expected effects on the reader. Hence it may not be useful to dissect biblical stories or motifs as belonging to specific (modern) genres.

Rabkin shares the idea that utopia and dystopia are actually the same and that a distinction that would see two different genres is not useful:

By analogy, we often call a work that projects a future bad society a “dystopia,” meaning “bad-place.” In other words, the genre of utopias contains both utopias and dystopias. This is a slight terminological confusion, but one so well established in genre criticism that it is difficult to overcome it.<sup>504</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature*, 140.

The approach of pointing out family resemblances is more valuable than locating two discrete genres. Biblical stories may offer proof that a certain hesitation between a potential utopia and a potential dystopia could be an underlying tendency that is definitive to utopias.

### 6.3.1. Cyclical relationship of utopias and dystopias

Jean Pfaelzer traces dystopian reactions to utopias in her book.<sup>505</sup> Dystopias or anti-utopias are seen as concrete reactions to the popularity of utopias. Anti-utopia is a critique of choosing utopian epistemology to consider the present; dystopia is a way of criticising current circumstances by narrating a cautionary tale. Hence, dystopia is quite similar to utopia in that it extrapolates from given issues in a Zero World, exaggerates them or imagines them brought to extremes. Utopia and dystopia alternate within stories.<sup>506</sup> Many dystopias, for example, contain a theme of undermining the dystopian system to introduce a better, possibly utopian one.<sup>507</sup>

As already mentioned above, for the cyclical changes between utopian and dystopian states we can draw on and critique Frye's *mythoi* model and Davies' re-interpretation of it. Northrop Frye has rendered the biblical storyline graphically, using waves, with high points and low points, representing desirable versus undesirable states in the story: a Promised Land, for example, is followed by a situation of exile.<sup>508</sup> Davies describes Frye's waves of *mythoi* as essentially moving from utopia to utopia.<sup>509</sup> He proposes to focus on the low points rather than the high points. The succession of utopian places followed by dystopian circumstances followed by redemption is seen by Davies as reversible into a sequence of

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<sup>505</sup> Pfaelzer, *The Utopian Novel in America*.

<sup>506</sup> Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* contains a fictional afterword, in which it is implied that that dystopian republic described in the novel has ended.

<sup>507</sup> Examples of dystopias containing at least a hope to end the dystopia are Alan Moore et al., *V for Vendetta* (New York: Vertigo/DC Comics, 2005), Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (London: Scholastic, 2009), Zamyatin, *We*.

<sup>508</sup> Frye, *The Great Code*, 171.

<sup>509</sup> Davies, "The Bible: Utopian, Dystopian, or Neither? Or: Northrop Frye Meets Monty Python," 95–96.

initial promise, promise failing, vision corroding, plan disintegrating – to be succeeded by another promise doomed to the same outcome, whether the result of human or divine fallibility, or ill will, or lack of faith.<sup>510</sup>

My case study passage Numbers 13 is located on the ascending wave of Frye's second wave, approaching the third utopian high point, "Promised Land 2" (after Eden, which is the first high point, and "Promised Land 1", the second high point). In Davies' dystopian model, YHWH's promise to Moses of liberation and land possession is the third initial promise that is doomed to be disappointed: "[...] This time the offer will be made to remove the existing inhabitants and provide the utopia of a land of milk and honey."<sup>511</sup> The cycle or wave, according to Davies, ends just before successful conquest, which must be in the vicinity of Numbers 13.

In a cycle of waves from utopian state to dystopian state according to Frye, Numbers 13 would be located at the vertex where downward development is just about to turn into the upward development towards the Promised Land. In both cases Numbers 13 is located at the threshold where development into good or bad are both possible.

According to Frye the story is just now ascending to its utopian high point of the Promised Land; according to Davies it is just now entering the dystopian region of a disappointed promise:

Rebellion breaks out, the people want to go back to Egypt, refuse to conquer their promised land because it looks too dangerous, and are punished by having to wait to die off before their children can enter the land.<sup>512</sup>

Frye implies overall progression: each wave begins at a slightly changed starting point, always with the inner-textual memory of the previous starting point(s) available. Davies implies what seems like an Elizabethan wheel of fortune: a structure of repetition where each starting point is not significantly different from the previous.

Davies's cycles, starting with the doomed promise, are similar to a tragic utopian circle which Lyman Tower Sargent describes, in which a utopian plan,

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<sup>510</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

if attempted to be forced upon a people, ultimately leads to violence, disillusion, and failure of that plan only to give rise to a new plan: “Utopia is thus the ultimate tragedy of human existence, constantly holding out the hope of a good life and repeatedly failing to achieve it.”<sup>513</sup>

This model of cyclical return of good and bad states moves along with the story’s progression. Passages can be located at a certain point on the ascent or descent of Frye’s waves or on a specific point in Davies’ cycle. The interpreter plays the role of observer of these waves or cycles. The interpreter might adopt the model of waves or cycles to approach the Bible as a utopia or a dystopia. The passage from Sargent cited here is concerned with disappointments of utopian hopes in reality, rather than the coming and going of utopia and dystopia in the progression of a story.

### **6.3.2. Simultaneous relationship: “Ustopia”**

There are links between the cycles, waves, or circles. They are not cleanly disconnected from each other. Ilana Pardes writes,

The spirit of the desert generation unsettles future generations as well. Even when the Israelites finally invade Canaan, the wandering does not fully stop. Exile piles up on exile. The Promised Land throughout biblical times is regarded with a certain degree of ambivalence.<sup>514</sup>

Margaret Atwood introduces a term which captures ambivalence with regard to utopia and dystopia well. She proposes the term “ustopia” rather than the separate terms dystopia and utopia, to show that one is often not separable from the other:

*Ustopia* is a word I made up by combining utopia and dystopia – the imagined perfect society and its opposite – because, in my view, each contains a latent version of the other.<sup>515</sup>

Frye, Davies, and Sargent either explicitly or implicitly assume a relationship between utopia and dystopia which progresses from one to the other. Others take a more synchronic perspective, for which Atwood’s

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<sup>513</sup> Sargent, “The Problem of the ‘Flawed Utopia’: A Note on the Cost of Eutopia,” 226.

<sup>514</sup> Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel*, 125.

<sup>515</sup> Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 66.

contraction “ustopia” would seem most appropriate.<sup>516</sup> Atwood emphasises that within the utopia itself there is a potential dystopia – for example the punishments for dissenters that are available in a utopia, or romantic motifs of momentary happiness that appear in dystopias.

The most convincing and simplest argument in favour of the utopia incorporating everything at the same time rather than following alternating waves or cycles is found in the pun itself. It can be seen as mainly *eu-topia*, the good place, or as mainly *ou-topia*, the no-place.

Utopia is simultaneously *ou-topos* and *eu-topos*, the negative of the positive and the positive of the negative, one in the other, as if it were a monogram where both must be read, one, then the other, in the same literal figure immediately given.<sup>517</sup>

The beauty of the pun is that it is not one or the other depending on how one turns this coin; it is both at the same time, which is hard to perceive and harder to imagine, because it is, on some level, as if both sides of a coin were seen simultaneously. One can only ever say that there are two sides and then say “this is one” and “this is the other”, as I have attempted to do for the “ustopian” elements of Numbers 13 above. What one wants to convey, however, is similar to the optical illusion called a thaumatrope, which is a fast-spinning disc, a bird on one side, an empty cage on the other, which, when spinning quickly, will look like there is a bird inside a cage.

It has been observed that the wilderness of the Pentateuch is full of ambiguity. This can be seen both in the pentateuchal passages about the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites and in passages making reference to the wilderness period in the prophetic books. The concept of the “ustopia”, or combined dystopia and utopia, can help to make sense of this phenomenon. An “ustopian” reading of these passages might not attribute a specific perspective on the wilderness to different traditions but relies on reading the text as a whole.

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<sup>516</sup> “[...] within each utopia, a concealed dystopia; within each dystopia, a hidden utopia, if only in the form of the world as it existed before the bad guys took over. Even in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – surely one of the most unrelievedly gloomy dystopias ever concocted – utopia is present, though minimally, in the form of an antique glass paperweight and a little woodland glade beside a stream. As for the utopias, from Thomas More onwards, there is always provision made for the renegades, those who don’t or won’t follow the rules: prison, enslavement, exile, exclusion, or execution.” Ibid.

<sup>517</sup> Marin, *Utopics*, 91.

I want to advocate reading ambiguities in an integrated “ustopian” way rather than in a successive way.

Pardes writes, “Canaan is more perplexing than anticipated: it is both good and bad, ‘fat’ yet inhospitable.”<sup>518</sup> Pardes integrates the ambiguity and discusses the ambiguous Promised Land using concepts that integrate two aspects into one. The first concept is “wonder”<sup>519</sup> – that is, the startle reflex when encountering something new and unexpected, hesitating between fight and flight. The other concept is Freud’s *unheimlich* or uncanny, homely and familiar at the same time as un-homely and strange.<sup>520</sup> Both of these concepts are defined by integrating two seemingly opposed reactions or perceptions.

Davies, on the other hand, sees a scribal debate as the cause of the simultaneous appearance of good and bad images of the wilderness in the book of Hosea.<sup>521</sup> The wilderness is already ambiguous in the Pentateuch, and “offers itself as a matrix for utopian/dystopian construction and reflection.”<sup>522</sup> This is an appropriate description of Numbers 13. The ambiguity Davies mentions indicates for him either a scribal debate or “if the entire text were assigned to a single author then he would be giving expression to an internal ambiguity.”<sup>523</sup> While ambiguity appears as a tell-tale sign for the presence of “ustopia”, there might be no real dichotomy between utopian and dystopian portrayals of the wilderness, since each contains the other, and utopia and dystopia are, in fact, the same.

[...] I suggest that the contents and function of the book of Hosea, at least as read in the Persia [*sic*] period, do not distinguish between an evil past and a good future, but confront the possibilities of an evil and good future.<sup>524</sup>

While Davies writes specifically about the book of Hosea, the confrontation of an evil-*and*-good future is present in Numbers 13 too. In Numbers 13, though, the belief in the future as evil is portrayed as a belief that brings about

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<sup>518</sup> Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel*, 101.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>521</sup> “We have in Hosea 2 a threat of return to wilderness, a dystopia; we also have a suggestion that wilderness might be a utopia, a return to a past time of innocence and loyalty.” Davies, “The Wilderness Years: Utopia and Dystopia in the Book of Hosea,” 168.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

punishment. “Utopia” might be an explanation of why the wilderness and the Promised Land contain a sustained ambiguity. It is definitely a utopia, and utopias contain both utopian and dystopian aspects.

### 6.3.3. Utopias are not neutral spaces

Another hypothesis, which has been brought forward by Louis Marin, can be tested on the biblical case study – the idea that a utopia might be neutral space. In the article “The Frontiers of Utopia”<sup>525</sup> Marin is concerned with the neutral space, with which utopia, according to him, plays. He works out the differences between terms such as horizon, frontier, *limen*, and *lisière* and claims that such spaces – spaces between the one and the other – are neutral, that they are a “locus of peace.”<sup>526</sup> Marin gives historical examples of politically neutral spaces, such as Iceland as a meeting place of Soviet and American leaders.

After reading the Promised Land as a threshold situation where both a good and a bad future seem possible, it does not seem convincing to characterise the utopian space as neutral. This particular utopian space of the Promised Land does not only exist in the realm of the hypothetical but is also understood as a political space by some of its readers. The moment a writer with a particular political outlook, from a particular time and culture describes his or her idea of a utopian space, it becomes a political space. It is no longer neutral.

The biblical story of Numbers 13 does not supply a neutral perspective on the land. There is the dystopian view and the utopian view. Howard Curzer has shown that neither is more truthful than the other.<sup>527</sup> There are two possibilities of aligning oneself, though: one might choose to believe in YHWH’s promise of the fertile land (and survive to conquer it and settle in it) or one might choose to reject the Promised Land as too dystopian (and would be punished by not attaining the land).

Since the Bible is often read as containing significant truth which is applicable to contemporary realities, an ethical problem with “neutral” spaces becomes visible when we try to apply Marin’s idea to a biblical case study such as Numbers 13. I have shown in chapter 4 and chapter 5 that the flawed utopian

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<sup>525</sup> Marin, “The Frontiers of Utopia.”

<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>527</sup> Curzer, “Spies and Lies.”

space as portrayed in Exodus-Numbers is not always understood as a fictional heuristic device but as a topical template to achieve a utopian state. If the space were “neutral”, one could simply settle in it. A contemporary reading of the Promised Land as “neutral” would deny a second party’s claim to the land.

Reading this utopian space as “both”, that is as containing in itself two sides, shows clearly how complex the space (in the text and in reality) really is. This integrated reading acknowledges that a conquest or a war will be necessary to eliminate inhabitants in a space that for certain readers’ ideological purposes needs to become a utopia without dystopian traits. The neutral utopia that does not contain an element of the undesirable that oscillates with the utopian vision has to be created, for example, by emptying the Promised Land of its current inhabitants. This can be done by not telling a story, telling only one side of the story, by denying history, or by inventing history.

#### **6.3.4. Utopia depends on the reader**

The following statement by Pardes summarises perfectly the dimension that is added to unravelling the utopian game, when we take into account the interpreter’s or reader’s idea of whether a text is utopian or dystopian:

Canaan is not inherently a land of milk and honey, nor is it the only land with cannibalistic tendencies. Any land can be both. Any land can be both the house of the living and the home of the dead. It all depends on the eye of the spy.<sup>528</sup>

To some extent, as I have argued above, the final decision of how, when, and where utopia and dystopia oscillate lies with the author, because by making authorial decisions the author takes the potentially neutral or simultaneous “ustopia” and follows, for example, a genre convention to make a particular work into a statement that is “mostly utopian” or “mostly dystopian”. When investigating whether the author intended to write a “mostly utopian” or “mostly dystopian” piece, we can use Rabkin’s test question<sup>529</sup> and ask if the fictional world appears to have the author’s approval. For Numbers 13 we might answer:

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<sup>528</sup> Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel*, 126.

<sup>529</sup> “Does the narrated world seem to have the author’s approval?” Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature*, 142.



the Promised Land appears to have the “author’s” approval, since those who oppose to conquest are punished for rejecting the idea.

One significant potential disjunction between the text that may have been intended to be utopian by its author and the perception an audience may have of the text, is the temporal placement of the reader.<sup>530</sup> The potential dystopian content of many utopias of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or other eras has been widely discussed.<sup>531</sup> The temporal location of the reader accounts for an additional level of estrangement that the original work did not intend. The original estrangement was intended to exist between the world portrayed inside the work and the reader contemporary to the time of writing.

The uncritical application of utopia to a society that has changed significantly since the utopian proposal was made can result in the utopia’s opposite. Applying an old utopia to new social realities can lead to neglecting responsibility towards reality, by anachronistically assuming that a utopian template can be applied to any reality. This anachronism is not the inconsequential play with temporal displacement and ideal types to allow reading utopia in the Bible; it is a dangerous anachronism that ignores important societal changes between utopia-production and the reality in which the inappropriate utopia is to be applied.

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<sup>530</sup> “Though utopian from their [19<sup>th</sup> century utopians] point of view some of these movements are dystopian from ours; indeed, in their frequent celebration of violence, they point to a recurring motif in literary as well as in political utopian thinking: the brave new order often comes about as the result of war and chaos.” Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 83. On the topic of the apocalyptic utopia, where the new utopian order is not brought about peacefully, but occurs after an apocalypse see chapter six in Pfaelzer, *The Utopian Novel in America*.

<sup>531</sup> “*Looking Backward* had, in its day, a stimulating and emancipating influence on the social thinking of the time [...]. Yet most of us today would tend to read it as a sinister blueprint of tyranny, with its industrial ‘army’, its stentorian propaganda delivered over the ‘telephone’ to the homes of its citizens, and the like.” Frye, “Varieties of Literary Utopias,” 29. Maria Varsam writes: “What links the discourse of freedom in both genres [female-authored dystopias and slave narratives] – and differentiates them from male-authored texts – is centered on the preoccupation with their reproductive rights, the freedom to choose motherhood, and their right to refuse it.” Varsam, “Concrete Dystopia: Slavery and Its Others,” 214–125. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s utopia of 1915, *Herland*, in an all-female society an individual woman cannot choose motherhood. It is a great honour, but an honour that is not available to everybody (due to biological reasons in this novel), neither do women who do give birth have the right to choose to raise their child themselves; the child becomes communal property. This would seem dystopian in Varsam’s sense. Kessler adds a thoughtful discussion of the problem of Gilman’s early 20<sup>th</sup> century utopian thought, which contains “unintentionally dystopian attitudes”, especially with regard to ethnocentrism and racism, which contemporary readers may find alarming: Kessler, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress toward Utopia with Selected Writings*, 45.

Hans Jonas has criticised the uncritical enthusiasm for the application of a utopian idea from a far removed time to current reality.<sup>532</sup> Jonas' reminder to inspect a past utopia before applying it enthusiastically in a different reality resonates with Carroll's warning of the Bible's unpredictable changes:

Who can predict or anticipate what new meanings will be given to biblical words, phrases, passages and books? Who can guess the ways the Bible will be used in contexts yet unknown?<sup>533</sup>

There are significant parallels between Jonas' argument about the non-applicability of past utopias and the problems of an uncritical use of biblical utopian templates, such as biblical law, in contemporary politics. A past utopian ideal cannot be applied to a significantly changed social reality. YHWH's ideal government would be a real-life dystopia.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> Jonas embarks from Bloch's formula "S ist noch nicht P", as the expression of an ideal of progress, which disregards that, which *is* ("S"), in order to bring about by all means that, which is not yet ("P"): "Als Grundaussdruck progressivistischer Weltanschauung kann Ernst Blochs Formel 'S ist noch nicht P' dienen, wo 'P' das Erwünschte und Aufgegebene als universaler Zustand und seine Herbeiführung unsere Aufgabe ist." Jonas, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, 256. The former enthusiasm for the utopian control over nature and technological advances has now become a danger to humanity: "Der Unbescheidenheit seiner [des Utopismus'] Zielsetzung, die ökologisch ebenso wie anthropologisch fehlgeht [...], stellt das Prinzip Verantwortung die bescheidenere Aufgabe entgegen, welche Furcht und Ehrfurcht gebieten: dem Menschen in der verbleibenden Zweideutigkeit seiner Freiheit, die keine Änderung der Umstände je aufheben kann, die Unversehrtheit seiner Welt und seines Wesens gegen die Übergriffe seiner Macht zu bewahren." Ibid., 9. In Jonas' example the utopia of plenty and the utopia of technological dominance over nature to exploit natural resources, bring about realistic problems of pollution, subsistence economics, the destruction of nature and its resources, and an energy crisis.

<sup>533</sup> Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold*, 90. Carroll's statement resonates with Beck's highly topical comment on using nuclear power without considering the effects of its use in the near and far future: "A couple of years ago the US Congress established an expert commission to develop a language or symbolism capable of warning against the threats posed by American nuclear waste dumps 10,000 years from now. The problem to be solved was: how must concepts and symbols be designed in order to convey a message to future generations, millennia from now?" Ulrich Beck, "All Aboard the Nuclear Power Superjet. Just Don't Ask about the Landing Strip," *The Guardian*, July 17, 2008, sec. Comment is free, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/jul/17/nuclearpower.climatechange>. Accessed October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013.

<sup>534</sup> Cf. Jacobs' project of following the Bible as literally as possible: A. J. Jacobs, *The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible* (London: Arrow, 2009). A.J. Jacobs: *My Year of Living Biblically*, accessed May 23, 2013, [http://www.ted.com/talks/a\\_j\\_jacobs\\_year\\_of\\_living\\_biblically.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/a_j_jacobs_year_of_living_biblically.html). (Accessed October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013). A satiric letter to a conservative radio presenter has been published on several blogs. The letter, attributed to James M. Kauffman, plays with the disjunction of taking biblical law literally in the modern world in order to expose anti-gay arguments relying on biblical verses as invalid. James M. Kauffman, "An Open Letter to Dr Laura Schlesinger," *Naked Capitalism*, March 24, 2010, <http://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2010/03/an-open-letter-to-dr-laura-schlesinger.html>. Accessed January 24th, 2013.

Ulrich Beck deals with dystopian outcomes of utopian models of societal progress too: “For Beck, the consequences of scientific and industrial development are a set of risks and hazards, the likes of which we have never previously faced.”<sup>535</sup> Beck’s and Jonas’ thoughts about modernity’s confrontations with formerly utopian (now dystopian) tendencies can be brought into a dialogue with the Bible. From Jonas I am drawing the idea that a biblical passage which may seem utopian will be able to cause harm, if it is attempted to be used as a principle of action in today’s reality. One example would be the idea of human domination over nature of Genesis which may result in the destruction of nature from exploitation.<sup>536</sup> Another example is the use of a biblical template of conquest for the treatment of those living in territories a group lays a claim to, which would result in genocide.

Temporal displacement and enforcement of an ancient utopia is dangerous. Hence my advocating to supply the Bible with a warning label. Beck speaks about the necessity of finding a language to warn future generations of today’s products: “[Nuclear energy] commits people for generations (in disposing of or storing atomic waste), for periods, that is, in which not even the unchanged meaning of the key words can be assured.”<sup>537</sup> Reading the Bible especially with an awareness of its dystopian potential, it seems quite reasonable to propose to find a warning label for the Bible. Language and society have changed since the Bible originated, but since it still exists, it needs to be dealt with in a responsible way, because its utopian and dystopian ideas have an impact on reality – or, put with Carroll, “Who can guess the ways the Bible will be used in contexts yet unknown?”<sup>538</sup>

Apart from temporal placement of a reader and the attempt to realise an ancient utopia in a different social reality, the identification of a reader will impact whether a story appears as utopian or dystopian. If we follow the story of

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<sup>535</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 2007), 2.

<sup>536</sup> Rogerson describes the debate about the impact of Genesis on the current ecological crisis: “If it was the case that modern science and technology were a realization of the Christian view of humanity’s God-given mastery over the natural world, then Christianity, and by implication the biblical creation stories, bore a huge burden of guilt for the present ecological crisis.” John W. Rogerson, “The Creation Stories: Their Ecological Potential and Problems,” in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* (London: Continuum, 2010), 21.

<sup>537</sup> Beck, *Risk Society*, 178.

<sup>538</sup> Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold*, 90.

Numbers 13 literally, we are told that an army of 600,000<sup>539</sup> Israelites was about to conquer violently the territory. If the story flipped its point of view, we were to hear a dystopian story, told by a Canaanite, about an unbeatable invading force whose idea of utopia is the possession of the Canaanite protagonists' cities. The dystopian story is present in the story of Numbers 13, but it is not told.

Depending on who the reader is inclined to identify with, the reader may ask for the dystopian side of the story to be told. For example, "[t]he obvious characters in the story for Native Americans to identify with are the Canaanites, the people who already lived in the promised land."<sup>540</sup> Warrior describes a circular development in the stories found in Exodus, Numbers, and Joshua. The liberationist god is on the side of the oppressed people, but the next step for the formerly oppressed people is to claim a land: "Israel's new dream became the land of Canaan" and "Yahweh the deliverer became Yahweh the conqueror."<sup>541</sup>

#### **6.4. *Excursus: fantasy and science fiction between characters and readers***

##### **6.4.1. Reading Numbers 13 as fantasy**

Some elements I have discussed as contributing to the construction of a dystopian space in this passage are using the fantastic as a vehicle to express this idea. The Nephilim or Anakites which are mentioned in this passage and induce fear in the community are identified as primeval giants,<sup>542</sup> the cluster of grapes seems supernaturally large.

<sup>539</sup> Num 2:32. This number does not include women, children, those unable to fight, and Levites.

<sup>540</sup> Warrior, "A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," 289.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Characteristics of the Anakites as drawn from biblical passages are:

a) They are strong and tall (Num 13:32; Deut 2:10, 2:21, 9:2) b) Invincible (Deut 9:2) c) If they were to be identified with the Nephilim (Num 13:33) they inhabited the earth in antediluvian times, where they were witnesses to the offspring of sons of God and human women d) Different tribes are considered to be a suborder of what seems to be an order – in biological terms – of Rephaim (Deut 2:11 and 2:20); the Anakites are part of the Rephaim (Deut 2:11) e) There are different local names for the tribes considered to be part of the Rephaim; the Moabite name for Rephaim is Emim (Deut 2:11), the Ammonite name for Rephaim is Zamzummim (Deut 2:20) f) YHWH destroyed them (Deut 2:21) g) Anakites inhabit the hill country but YHWH promises to aid in driving them out (Josh 14:12) h) Joshua destroys them (Josh 11:21), only some are left outside of the newly conquered Israelite territory (Josh 11:22) i) Caleb drives Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmi out of the hill country (Josh 15:13; Judg 1:20) j) Kiriath-Arba, identified in all three passages with Hebron, is named after the father of Anak or a great man of Anak (Josh 15:13; 21:11; 14:15); Josh 14:15 does not say father, but rather "greatest man among the Anakites" – אדם הגדול בענקים –

Continuing an investigation into the relationship between a biblical text, its readers throughout time and its creators, horror or fantasy theory can be a useful additional tool. Below observations by fantasy and horror theorists are integrated with readings of the biblical passage. Once again, these theorists' works are not read in order to decide on a correct classification of the biblical passage as belonging to a modern genre. The concern will be to show how the properties of a text – the biblical text, for example – change, depending on when and how it is read, informed by which theories or presuppositions.

The reader of Numbers 13 encounters giants. A reader such as Martin Noth, who reads the place names mentioned in this passage as potentially real, must find a strategy to read this image too. If the places were real, were the giants real as well? Todorov defines the fantastic in literature as inducing a hesitation in the reader about what is real. Noth is a reader who does indeed hesitate when it comes to the “sons of Anak” and their identification as “Nephilim” in Numbers 13:

It remains, of course, obscure what may have been meant by the designation “necklace descendants” [the literal translation of “sons of Anak”]. At any rate it seems to indicate figures of a legendary period, of whom a local tradition from Hebron purported to tell, powerful “giant-like” figures who, for strangers who wished to try to capture the town of Hebron, were forbidding and frightening.<sup>543</sup>

Noth hesitates to read the giants as real; to him they are a real local legend. Now, does Noth imply that this a real local legend which real historical spies about to try to capture Hebron knew about, or does he imply that this was a real local legend in Hebron which biblical authors knew about? Furthermore: does Noth assume that the biblical authors believed in the literality of the legendary period and thus believed in the existence of literal giants? In fantasy theory (and also in biblical studies) one encounters readings of ancient texts that do not grant the creators, editors, and original readers of texts the critical capacities of creating, transmitting, or reading stories as symbols, as entertainment, or as

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k) There is a recurring connotation of being a remnant of the past. Og, King of Bashan, is a remnant of the Rephaim (Deut 3:11). Some Anakites remain outside of newly conquered Israelite territory (Josh 11:22); Two passages mention that the large inhabitants lived formerly in Moabite and Ammonite territory, they are a thing of the past (Deut 2:10 and 2:20).

<sup>543</sup> Noth, *Numbers*, 103.

sophisticated metaphors of identity construction. I agree with Feldt's criticism of a tendency to show a type of "Orientalism"<sup>544</sup> – it could be called Past-ism – in much criticism of ancient texts,

which sees the pre-modern as univocal, locative and closed, and would read ancient religious narratives as determinative of the worldview of the ancients, not as potentially subversive, transformative, playful or make-believe-like.<sup>545</sup>

Rosemary Jackson says that the fantastic potential of a text depends on the society it is read in.

Presenting that which cannot be, but *is*, fantasy exposes a culture's definitions of that which can be: it traces the limits of its epistemological and ontological frame. Definitions of what can "be", and images of what cannot be, obviously undergo considerable historical shifts. Non-secularized societies hold different beliefs from secular cultures as to what constitutes "reality".<sup>546</sup>

Generally, what is understood to be fantastic can and will change depending on the expectations of the reader. So would Noth be right if he assumed that biblical authors believed in the literal truth of a legend about giants?

Jackson further writes, "Texts subvert only if the reader is disturbed by their dislocated narrative form."<sup>547</sup> I disagree with Jackson's thought that fairy tales, for example, should not be considered fantasy, because "traditional" non-secularised societies did not have a category for the unreal or fantastic, because members of such societies would believe in the supernatural.<sup>548</sup>

Jackson appears to imply that non-secularised societies would not be disturbed by talking wolves eating the grandmother or frogs turned into princes. Here I see the question repeated of how a text reflects what a culture or society

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<sup>544</sup> Laura Feldt, *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative from Exodus to Elisha* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012), 50.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>546</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1988), 23.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

<sup>548</sup> Some passages of Jackson's book evoke a suspicion of a certain Past-ism – similar to Orientalism – in which what she calls "traditional" or "non-secularised" societies are seen as homogenous and naive. Psychological research – though more is needed – has found that superstition and belief in magic is not limited to so-called "primitive" societies. Stuart A. Vyse, *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 202. "As we have noted, superstition and belief in the paranormal are surprisingly common in our modern, technologically sophisticated age." Ibid., 209.

“believes” and how we are supposed to extract from a text – which may be most if not all we have – the dominant epistemology of the culture behind the text. Expecting that a text can reveal what the society in which the text was created thought of as real or possible is difficult, as I have already argued in chapter 3 on using utopia to conclude on reality.

Since my conclusion was that we have to exercise caution when attempting to extract the reality of a community from reading only a text, I am not going to follow Jackson in making a sweeping statement about whether or not creators, editors, or original transmitters of biblical texts such as Numbers 13 believed in the existence of giants. I am also going to stop latching on to Noth now, because his reading does not allow me to conclude whether or not he believed that biblical authors believed in giants.

Pardes is a Bible reader who does not hesitate: in her reading the giants exist. They exist as elements of a story which contribute to the construction of an intricate discourse on identity and home. Rabkin’s nuanced investigation about the fantastic in literature takes into account the context established by an author in a text to measure what is unexpected in this text and what is expected either within the story or between reader and story.<sup>549</sup> Rabkin thinks of a text as establishing its own world with consistent rules, to see the degrees of the fantastic. Fairy tales, according to him, establish a world in which the fantastic is not unexpected. Little Red Riding Hood is not particularly disturbed to encounter a wolf that can talk. The degree to which an occurrence is judged as unexpected (within the text, by a character, or by the reader) is what creates the fantastic, rather than a relationship between the text and the society in which it was created.

In Numbers 13 we have a text in which the fantastic is expected by the characters: the spies and the community in Numbers 13 do not doubt the reality of the giants. However, that does not at all mean that a producing, editing, or transmitting community would have believed in giants literally.

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<sup>549</sup> “We have then three classes of signal for the fantastic: signals of the characters [...], signals of the narrator [...], and signals of the implied author [...]; however, each class of signal can be properly interpreted only by reference to the ground rules of the narrative world, ground rules that are foisted upon the reader in large part by his whole life’s training in the reading of literature and its many grapholects.” Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature*, 24–25.

For this continued project of looking for useful approaches to the biblical text on its diachronic trajectory between original creators, editors, “committed”, and non-believing readers, Todorov’s definition of the fantastic could help to assess the fantastic potential of the biblical passage, especially with regard to its readers. Todorov’s definition of fantasy includes three conditions:

First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus, the reader’s role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work – in the case of naïve reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as “poetic” interpretations.<sup>550</sup>

Todorov says that the first and the third of these conditions are definitive characteristics of the genre, whereas the second is optional. Todorov’s definition employs both textual characteristics, such as whether the character experiences natural/supernatural hesitation, but is mostly reader-dependent, which makes it very useful in this discussion.

Commentators on the biblical text occasionally fulfil one or more of Todorov’s conditions. Condition 1a) is that the reader considers the world of the text as a world of living persons. Informed by Philip Davies and Keith Whitelam,<sup>551</sup> I see many 20<sup>th</sup> century Bible commentators considering the biblical text to be presenting a world of living, even historical, persons. Even if commentators choose which element described in (for example) Numbers 13 to read literally and which element to read as a metaphor, many commentators surveyed in this thesis attempt to locate at least some aspects of the story in reality.<sup>552</sup> The world of the text is perceived as a quite faithful depiction of a world of living persons.

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<sup>550</sup> Tsvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard and Robert Scholes (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 33.

<sup>551</sup> Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel*. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel*.

<sup>552</sup> One attempt to show the text’s reality by all means would be Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai*. I would, in response to this book, say that Hoffmeier’s book is a piece of fantasy-fiction, which is set in an implied hypothetical parallel universe in which Edward Said has never written anything.



Todorov's condition 1b) is that the reader hesitates between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. This goes hand in hand with switching smoothly between a realistic explanation such as locating the places mentioned in the biblical story on a map and thinking of characters such as Moses, Caleb, Joshua, or the Israelites as a realistic description of historical figures, and a supernatural explanation, in which one might include metaphorical explanations. The "land that devours" is interpreted as a metaphor or as an ancient Near Eastern literary or semantic trope by most modern commentators. It is not taken literally. Thus, there is significant switching or hesitation between attributing natural explanations to the events of the text and supernatural, metaphoric ones (obviously I'm using the term "supernatural" quite loosely here, to refer to a metaphorical reading).

Todorov's second condition is that characters experience this kind of hesitation as well. The characters of Numbers 13 are not round enough to allow a clear statement on whether they hesitate between a natural or supernatural explanation of, for example, the Nephilim. When told that the country is settled by Nephilim, the community's response is to cry and suggest returning to Egypt. It seems as though the information is taken literally and there is little or no hesitation between a supernatural or natural explanation. Either way, both explanations inspire fear in the protagonists (in this sense, the Nephilim are a convincing horror monster<sup>553</sup>).

The third condition, which has to do with reader-response again, is that the reader is not to read the text as poetic or as an allegory. In commentary on Numbers 13 we are encountering a mix of attitudes. Some modern critics appear to read this passage quite literally, but often it is mixed with poetic approaches, such as reading "a land that devours its inhabitants" as a metaphor. Source critics are obviously aware that there is a mix of traditions and that it is a literary artefact they are dealing with, however, some do attribute historicity to the story or to some elements of it.

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<sup>553</sup> "[Horrific monsters] must be dangerous. This can be satisfied simply by making the monster lethal. That it kills and maims is enough. The monster may also be threatening psychologically, morally, or socially. It may destroy one's identity (William Blatty's *The Exorcist* or Guy de Maupassant's "The Horla"), seek to destroy the moral order (Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* et al.), or advance an alternative society (Richard Matheson's *I am Legend*)." Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or Paradoxes of the Heart* (London: Routledge, 1990), 43.

Which elements are seen as actual or historical and which elements are seen as poetic or allegorical can be quite arbitrary. Many approaches, including my approach, are inclined to see the story as poetic, if not allegorical. It is part of a larger teaching of ideology, couched in stories, which includes obedience to divine command, trust in the leading elite, and the message that if what is divinely promised is slandered, the slanderer will be punished and can bring punishment over the whole community. If this third feature is definitive, according to Todorov, I cannot read this passage as fantasy in his sense. I would suggest that others, in the past, have read it as fantasy without realising that they were doing so, by fulfilling the condition that the text is not read as poetic or an allegory, but as a description of a literal event, which then has to find a way to deal with the supernatural in it.

To conclude this section: Laura Feldt, following Renate Lachmann, sees the fantastic as a “discourse on alterity.”<sup>554</sup> Pardes reads fantastic elements as part of a discourse on the arbitrariness of the construction of “home”.<sup>555</sup> Noth, on the other hand, seems to attribute a literal belief in giants to a community of the past. How real or fantastic Numbers 13 is depends on many categories, readings, and relationships. Theory on the fantastic is used to considering such categories. It is worthwhile to look to these discussions to take second look at both the Bible and the mechanics and trends in biblical criticism.

#### **6.4.2. Numbers 13 resembles science fiction to a higher degree than fantasy**

Feldt’s and Pardes’ readings as a discourse on alterity or discourse on identity are very useful; inspired by them I am now going to look at how fantastic elements such as the giants contribute to such identity construction or even world-construction. By “world-construction” I mean the construction of the Promised Land as an ambiguous area and its relationship to a real world juxtaposed with the text at a given time. Here I am not looking at whether or not one can reconstruct the Zero World, but at how one can see the juxtaposition of the worlds.

In the essay “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre” Darko Suvin differentiates between science fiction (SF), utopia, and fantasy. Suvin sees

<sup>554</sup> Feldt, *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative from Exodus to Elisha*, 57.

<sup>555</sup> Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel*, 126.

cognitive estrangement – a concept he developed informed by Shklovsky’s *ostranenie* and Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt* – as a definitive trait of the science fiction genre. Suvin defines SF as

a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment.<sup>556</sup>

The genre establishes a literary (fictional) premise and follows it through with “scientific rigor”.<sup>557</sup> Suvin differentiates SF from fantasy by saying that “the fantasy (ghost, horror, Gothic, weird) tale, [is] a genre committed to the interposition of anti-cognitive laws into the empirical environment,”<sup>558</sup> whereas SF seeks to explore an alternative to the empirical environment of the author.

The questions SF raises, similar to utopia, are about the possibility of societal change and flux. They are raised by juxtaposing an alternative environment with the empirical environment. Numbers 13 as a literary vision of a threshold situation negotiates exactly such questions. It does not merely introduce a fantastic element or “anti-cognitive law”<sup>559</sup> into an environment. It delivers two versions of a future vision of a changed society. One is portrayed as the “right” one to pursue – the utopian vision, in which the community will take possession of the utopian ancestral homeland with divine help. The other one, the dystopian vision, which is also the one that brings punishment over the community, is the one that suggests that conquest may fail and cause a change in the community from existing under dire circumstances to not existing at all, being assimilated, enslaved, or killed.

[SF] does not ask about The Man or The World, but which man?: in which kind of world?: and why such a man in such a kind of world? As a literary genre, SF is just as opposed to supernatural estrangement as to empiricism (naturalism).<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Suvin, “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre,” 375.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid., 374.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 374.

Numbers 13 responds to these questions: “which man?” – the god-fearing, obedient person or the rebel? The rebels are killed. “In which kind of world?” – In a world flowing with milk and honey or in a world under domination by an overpowering Other? – “why such a man in such a kind of world?” – the obedient god-fearing person in a peaceful world which provides resources freely, because they trust in divine providence, or the rebellious person in no world at all, in *Sheol*, because they are critical of the leading elite or divine command.

Suvin and Rabkin’s thoughts on the literary worlds created by different genres have helped and can help to give a nuanced answer to many questions that arise when we look at the different elements coming together in the biblical text and the many ways of reading it. Since the spies of Numbers 13 appear to accept the presence of giants as part of their reality, I will follow Suvin’s distinction between fantasy as an “impure” genre, which “fails to establish a super-ordinated maleficent world of its own, causing a grotesque tension between arbitrary supernatural phenomena and the empirical norms they infiltrate”<sup>561</sup> and advocate a reading of Numbers 13 as a discourse on identity and alterity, which juxtaposes a fictional world (the Promised Land) with an implied reality and is thus to a very high degree similar to modern science fiction.

Suvin’s definitions seem to hinge on the literary world that is created, and how and to what end fantastic images function within that world. A historical community’s perception of what is real or not-real (as in Jackson) is not used to define genre, neither is a reader’s or character’s engagement with the story or events depicted in the story as either poetic or real as in Todorov. The “cognitive” element of Suvin’s cognitive estrangement refers not only to reflecting an author’s environment, but also to a reflexion *on* the author’s environment. The ability to create such a critical cognitive debate should not be denied the original creators of the biblical text.

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<sup>561</sup> Ibid., 376.

## 7. The Science Fiction of Numbers 13 in Space and Time

### *Chapter summary*<sup>562</sup>

After reading the utopia of Numbers 13 with Martin Noth, William Bradford, and Cotton Mather, this chapter proposes another reading of Numbers 13 as utopia or rather, as science fiction (SF). I want to end by considering this theme for two reasons: 1) “[...] in the endangered today [...]”,<sup>563</sup> Suvin writes, it is not enough to reflect on utopia: “Utopian reflections, in and out of fiction, have now to undertake openings that lead towards agency: action.”<sup>564</sup>

2) SF is the most contemporary utopian reading:

[...] utopian fiction is, today and retrospectively, both an independent aunt and a dependent daughter of sf. The lines of consanguinity begin to intertwine in H.G. Wells’s sociobiological sf, where biology is mainly a metaphor for social class.<sup>565</sup>

The action taken is to read the Bible as SF and also to see those who read the Bible in the contemporary world as readers of a piece of SF. On the one hand, this adds a new perspective to existing commentary on the book of Numbers and on the other hand it encourages a constructive estranged reading of an estranged text.

This chapter seeks to tie together everything said so far by proposing my own reading of the Bible and Numbers 13 as science fiction. All previous

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<sup>562</sup> Earlier versions of 7.3 are going to be published as Frauke Uhlenbruch, “Numbers 13 - by Gene Roddenberry,” in *Methods, Theories and Imaginations: Social Scientific Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. David Chalcraft, Frauke Uhlenbruch, and Rebecca Watson, The Bible and Social Science (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, forthcoming), tbc.

<sup>563</sup> Suvin, “Theses on Dystopia 2001,” 187; cf. Beck, *Risk Society*; Robert Wuthnow, *Be Very Afraid: The Cultural Response to Terror, Pandemics, Environmental Devastation, Nuclear Annihilation, and Other Threats* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>564</sup> Suvin, “Theses on Dystopia 2001,” 187.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

themes underlie this reading: the ideal typical family resemblance between Numbers 13 and a *Star Trek* episode allows this anachronistic comparison. An epistemological connection is furthermore provided by Borges' short story "Pierre Menard – Author of the Quixote" and his essay "Kafka and His Precursors".

A science fiction reading complements a utopian reading such as the one I have offered in chapter 4. This time, I am not going to read a previous reader's commentary. I am (subjectively, reflexively as advocated for biblical reader response criticism,<sup>566</sup> and consciously in the first person singular) the reader who reads Numbers 13 – not literally, not historically, not from a point of view of chosen-ness, but eclectically from the point of view of somebody trying to make sense of the presence of texts such as Numbers 13 in a world in which it co-exists with texts such as *Utopia*, *Star Trek* and *Risk Society*.

Since I have read Numbers 13 with Bradford and Mather in chapter 5 and concluded that the text contains an inherent potential for turning into an experienced dystopia for those on the margins of the utopian protagonist community, I integrate the co-existence of a positive (utopian) potential contained in the text and a destructive (dystopian) potential contained in the text by showing that a similar discourse on positive and negative consequences of an encounter with something new and Other, still exists. Such discourses on identities appear in science fiction literature, for example by Carl Sagan, the Strugatsky brothers and Stanislaw Lem. They also appear in sociological discourse, for example in Georg Simmel and Charles Horton Cooley.

The warning label is complete: the Bible in the contemporary world is a message from a far removed time and space. Some readers understand the Bible to be a message transmitted by a non-human entity, which they believe can be deciphered, and if deciphered correctly can lead to their personal salvation. Some biblical scholars might agree with me that efforts at deciphering the Bible reveal more about our contemporary ideologies, disagreements, and motifs, than about the Bible itself.

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<sup>566</sup> The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible*, 53.

### 7.1. *The Bible is an estranged and removed text*

To begin, I am going to survey theorists' opinions about how utopia and SF are related, and how to look for SF in the Bible. Suvin's concept of cognitive estrangement is useful both for utopia and SF readings to see how the biblical stories compare and contrast fictional worlds to make statements about identity: "us" and "them". In order to apply the concept of cognitive estrangement to this biblical passage, it may be necessary to allow some liberty in the interpretation of Suvin's concept, but it does not have to be strained very far. Suvin sees the crucial concept of SF as a cognitive estrangement that happens between text and reader, which makes the reader of a piece of SF reflect upon their own empirical environment.<sup>567</sup> Furthermore, SF is a genre that allows relatively free play with temporal settings and perspectives.

SF concentrates on possible futures and their spatial equivalents, but it can deal with the present and the past as special cases of a possible historical sequence seen from an estranged point of view (by a figure from another time and/or space). SF can thus use the creative potentialities of an approach not limited by a consuming concern with empirical surfaces and relationships.<sup>568</sup>

This statement applies to the Bible and to its readers in today's world. The biblical text we read includes references to possible futures: the future Jerusalem, the heavenly kingdom, the apocalypse and so on. It also includes references to all time, if we consider "committed" perspectives that see the Bible as eternally applicable to every reality. Some understand biblical stories as reliable accounts of a past. The Bible contains several versions and visions of differently perceived pasts. For example, the portrayals of the wilderness stories in the prophetic books are ambiguous; ambivalent perspectives on human and/or divine kingship are found in the book of Judges,<sup>569</sup> and differently perceived pasts are portrayed in Chronicles as opposed to Kings.<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>567</sup> See especially Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre."

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>569</sup> Ian Douglas Wilson, "Judges, Social Memory, and Kingship in Post-Monarchic Judah," Unpublished paper, 2012.

<sup>570</sup> Boer and Schweitzer have dealt with past-tweaking in Chronicles in Boer, *Novel Histories* and Schweitzer, *Reading Utopia in Chronicles*.

The Bible plays with temporal levels, just like Suvin says SF does. On the whole, the estranged point of view is not so much represented by a character within the text who comes from a different time or culture but indeed by any reader of the Bible today. Robert Carroll writes, accurately, that “[The Bible] is not, of course, a European book at all, but a collection of books from a past not our own and from cultures very different from ours.”<sup>571</sup> Today’s reader *is* a figure from another space and time when it comes to reading the Bible. One could almost say that the Bible cannot be read as anything but SF in today’s world: “In some ways the Bible shares with all ancient writings the further difficulties of alien thought in alien languages from alien times.”<sup>572</sup>

The last sentence of Suvin’s statement cited above can be used as a methodological tether: “SF can thus use the creative potentialities of an approach not limited by a consuming concern with empirical surfaces and relationships.”<sup>573</sup> Or re-phrased: the approach of reading SF in the Bible can use creative potentialities and does not limit itself to being concerned with empirical surfaces and relationships. This experiment is about trying to see which new avenues open up if we read it from such a point of view. This reading is not concerned with empirical surfaces and relationships. Such empirical surfaces could be historical dependencies like source critical questions of which part of the text came first. They could also be relationships of genres within the text, which form critical approaches might be concerned with, or they might be an effort of an exact reconstruction of the historical circumstances at the creation of a text.

This chapter uses theory on SF and utopia to look at Numbers 13 once again, with a slightly adjusted vision towards SF, rather than utopia. It draws on specific examples from SF literature and film to compare and contrast the trajectory of the story of Numbers 13. Not just similarities, but also dissimilarities are discussed. It is an anachronism to compare directly the biblical text to a *Star Trek* episode, but family resemblances exist and they can be used to open up a new reading of Numbers 13, while demonstrating that the

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<sup>571</sup> Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold*, 1.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>573</sup> Suvin, “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre,” 377.



practice of associative or dissociated ideal typical comparison of phenomena can yield important results, as long as they are not presented as universal truth.

## **7.2. *Science fiction theory can be applied to the Bible***

The works by authors surveyed here have been read with regard to the question of how utopia and SF are related and whether a text that might pre-date the rise of the SF genre (mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century) can *be* SF or only resembles it to some extent. The authors do not deal with the Bible specifically. I attempt to extrapolate from their theories to point out continuities and discontinuities when applying SF to the Bible.

Different suggestions for a reading of the Bible in general as SF are made drawing on Suvin, Williams, Atwood, Rabkin, and Boer. For example, I will suggest that one can apply Suvin's theory about the SF "novum" to the Bible, and that Williams' four types of transformations in utopia and SF have certain parallels in the Bible. It can help to compare and contrast SF and myth to make new statements about the Bible, and finally the Bible refers to possibilities in the "not-yet", both in today's world in the world in which it was originally created.

### **7.2.1. YHWH is the "novum" of the Bible**

Darko Suvin is a frequently cited authority not only on utopia but also on utopia as opposed to SF. The concept of estrangement, as mentioned above, is one contribution to SF theory made by Suvin. Another approach to defining SF and the boundaries of the genre introduced by Suvin is the concept of the "novum" in SF. The "novum" is the crucial concept, which the author invents to make the textual world appear different from the world in which it is read.

Suvin states that SF begins by positing a "fictional ('literary') hypothesis and develops it with extrapolating and totalizing ('scientific') rigor."<sup>574</sup> SF, he says, follows a post-Baconian view of technological advancement. If something *is* SF, then, according to Suvin, it has to be written from a post-Baconian perspective of scientific progress. If SF has to be post-Baconian this would

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<sup>574</sup> Ibid., 374.

disqualify the Bible from *being* SF. However, the Bible's reader or interpreter is post-Baconian and post-Einsteinian:

[...] science has since Marx and Einstein been an open-ended corpus of knowledge, so that all imaginable new corpuses which do not contravene the philosophical basis of the scientific method in the author's time [...] can play the role of scientific validation in SF.<sup>575</sup>

The Bible is not post-Baconian, unless made post-Baconian by its post-Baconian reader, and it is not governed by a scientific principle. However, it does pose an hypothesis ("What would a world governed by YHWH look like?") and follows it through with some rigour when dealing with questions, as in Numbers 13, of obedience to YHWH and what happens if a group of community members were to rebel or disagree with the hypothesis of YHWH's governance. Suvin's concept can then be applied by the post-Baconian and post-Einsteinian reader to a text that did not have the concept of "scientific rigour" at its disposal when it was first written but bears family resemblances in following through its hypothesis "What would a world governed by YHWH look like?" in stories and laws.

Suvin's definition of SF relies on the concept of the novum: "My axiomatic premise [...] is that SF is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional 'novum' (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic."<sup>576</sup>

The Bible may indeed follow through a hypothesis with proto-scientific rigour appropriate to the "scientific method in the authors' time".<sup>577</sup> The biblical laws and their application might be an example of such an innovation that is applied inner-biblically. Miriam's removal from the camp in Numbers 12 is in accordance with a law established in Leviticus 13:2-4. The stoning of the man collecting wood on the Sabbath in Numbers 15:35 is in accordance with a law of Exodus 31:15.

The novum has to be hegemonic, Suvin says, the innovation has to be so "central and significant that it determines the whole narrative logic [...]".<sup>578</sup> The biblical proto-novum that dominates the narrative of the Bible is the belief in

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<sup>575</sup> Suvin, *Defined by a Hollow*, 72.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>577</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

YHWH and the laws given at Sinai. If the Bible follows this novum through rigorously and juxtaposes it with a world of an author or a reader in which this novum of following YHWH does not exist, then the Bible can *be* SF after all. The novum of a global belief in YHWH is a fictional novum, since complete global belief in YHWH and following exactly of levitical law does not exist.

Now we are at a point where it makes most sense to open up the biblical text and not discuss what might be going on inner-biblically (the novum of monotheistic YHWHistic belief, followed through with some legislative and realistic rigour) but what happens when a reader encounters this fiction:

The effect of such factual reporting of fictions is one of confronting a set normative system [...] with a point of view or glance implying a new set of norms; in literary theory, this is known as the attitude of estrangement.<sup>579</sup>

A reader confronted in this way might be the contemporary reader/listener of the biblical text at the time of its creation. It could also be a reader from the year 2013. Both of these readers would be encountering the normative system of the text within a set of norms in their empirical realities. Arguably both readers would experience the estrangement, since for neither reader the text represents faithfully an experienced reality.

SF is, then a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment.<sup>580</sup>

There would have been such an interaction of estrangement and cognition in an ancient reader of the Bible, when stories about a glorious monarchy as presented in Kings or Chronicles or stories about a comparatively small community of Israelites conquering the land of Canaan would have been juxtaposed with an empirical situation of non-dominance under the government of a larger empire.<sup>581</sup> There is such an interaction in a modern-day reader too.

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<sup>579</sup> Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," 374.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>581</sup> Ehud Ben Zvi shows how multiple utopian visions in prophetic books are juxtaposed with a real situation of non-dominance of a relatively small community in Ben Zvi, "Utopias, Multiple Utopias, and Why Utopias at All?".

The Bible's alternative framework's alien-ness appears particularly clearly if the Bible is read and enacted literally.<sup>582</sup>

We are imposing a lot onto the text rather than extrapolating from it, if it is approached from a specific perspective, such as SF. Suvin would probably disagree with my suggesting that the Bible might contain texts that are similar to SF. SF, he says, is not to be seen as more "than a stimulus for independent thinking", it is not the "reigning theology of the day [...]" nor is it to be seen as prophetic.<sup>583</sup> A good case could be made for many biblical passages being understood (inner and extra-biblically) as any or all of these.

Suvin differentiates between utopia and SF in the following way – a way with which I do not agree entirely:

In case the imaginatively constructed community is not based principally on socio-political but on other radically different principles, say biological or geological, we are dealing with science fiction (sf). The realization that sociopolitics cannot change without all other aspects of life also changing has led to sf's becoming the privileged locus of utopian fiction in the twentieth century.<sup>584</sup>

Applying this to Numbers 13, we find changed biology: an enormous grape and enormous inhabitants as well as a land that offers up its produce without much work. Governing the Promised Land would bring about a socio-political change, too, as it would transform the community from being largely nomadic to being a sedentary community with a centre of worship and city infrastructure.

The final point drawn from Suvin which I would like to mention to point to the family resemblances between the Bible and SF is found in Suvin's differentiation between SF and fantasy. In SF, he says, the novum is "cognitively validated"<sup>585</sup> whereas in fantasy it is not. In SF the coming about of the novum is explained. In fantasy it can stay unexplained and supernatural. SF, as opposed to fantasy, posits an "alternative on the same ontological level as the author's empirical reality [...]"<sup>586</sup> For the biblical text it may depend very much

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<sup>582</sup> I have already made reference to the letter written to a literalist radio host that makes taking biblical law literally seem hilariously absurd. A similar effect is achieved in the book Jacobs, *The Year of Living Biblically*.

<sup>583</sup> Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," 379.

<sup>584</sup> Suvin, "Theses on Dystopia 2001," 188.

<sup>585</sup> Suvin, *Defined by a Hollow*, 72.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

on who reads it, whether an event is attributed to the supernatural or is seen, for example, as a metaphor.

I do not want to make assumptions about whether or not the ancient authors believed in the presence of literal giants. The modern-day reader may be inclined to read giants as a signifier for something non-supernatural:

For though mutants or Martians<sup>587</sup>, ants<sup>588</sup> or intelligent nautiloids can be used as signifiers, they can only signify human relationships, given that we cannot – at least so far – imagine other ones.<sup>589</sup>

This is a very important statement that I use to justify my reading below of the encounter with Nephilim and the description of oneself as a grasshopper as ultimately exploring the potential encounter with a human (not a supernatural) Other.

### **7.2.2. YHWHism is a “willed transformation”**

Another family resemblance between the Bible and SF appears when we apply four general types of utopia and SF proposed by Raymond Williams to the Bible. Using four types might be a good guideline, although it does not fit into my general framework of the ideal type and fluid boundaries. Just as I have repeatedly critiqued Lyman Tower Sargent’s taxonomy of utopias<sup>590</sup> as creating boxes that restrict the variety we can see in the genre, I would say that while four types of utopia/SF might be a useful guideline, they are yet another system that boxes in the phenomenon in a particular way.

Williams’ four types<sup>591</sup> are

a) paradise (or hell, in dystopia). Protagonists travel by some mode to a place that is significantly different in being either better (paradise) or worse (hell). Most classically structured journey-utopias/dystopias are narratives of this type, for example Thomas More’s *Utopia*. Williams’ first category of paradise (or hell, in dystopia) is clearly indebted to the Bible itself. The prototype for both comes from the Bible.

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<sup>587</sup> Or Nephilim.

<sup>588</sup> Or grasshoppers.

<sup>589</sup> Suvin, *Defined by a Hollow*, 76.

<sup>590</sup> Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited.”

<sup>591</sup> He describes the categories in Williams, *Culture and Materialism*, 220–223.

b) an externally altered world. In this type of narrative, a natural or magical event changes the circumstances of human life significantly. Those who experience the alteration are not the ones to bring it about, they are its objects, not its initiators.

The covenant with YHWH is a family resemblance to this type of utopia or SF. The covenant is not actively initiated by humans, but initiated by YHWH.<sup>592</sup> The externally altered world of the Bible is a state of being in which a community thrives under divine legislation and in the covenant, which YHWH initiated.

c) a willed transformation. Members of a community make a conscious decision to transform the society in which they live, sometimes relying on a particular concept, such as “secularity and rationality”,<sup>593</sup> or science. There is some “social agency”<sup>594</sup> involved in the bringing about of the willed transformation.

The acceptance of the “novum” of YHWHism is a willed transformation (in addition to being an external transformation). It is made clear throughout the Hebrew Bible that following YHWH and entering into the covenant is a choice. It is certainly possible to worship other gods and build golden calves, but the consequences are not portrayed as particularly desirable.

d) a technological transformation. Related in many aspects to c) “willed transformation”, this type of transformation is not so much a change in society by relying on an abstract concept like rationality or reason, but a transformation brought about by the introduction of a particular technological change. The biblical world is not technologically transformed as such, because this is a concept derived from experiences in a post-industrialised world.

However, since I have already strained Suvin’s notion of the novum so far as to apply it to the Bible, I would say that Williams’ second, third, and fourth categories find family resemblances in the Bible: the world is externally altered by YHWH’s appearance and initiation of a covenant, following the covenant is to some degree a willed transformation and if we see YHWH as a proto-

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<sup>592</sup> YHWH often initiates contact, for example in Gen 12:1, Gen 22:1, Ex 3:2.

<sup>593</sup> Williams, *Culture and Materialism*, 221.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

scientific novum, the transformation could be considered akin to a technological transformation.

Williams regards SF as closely linked to a type of utopianism that is not concerned with the systematic description of alternate societies but a type of narrative that uses the descriptions of changed societies as a heuristic device.<sup>595</sup> Approaching the Bible as utopia is to explore the possibility of it as a heuristic device: using X to explain Y. William Bradford used the Bible to make sense of a first contact situation. The original redactors of the pentateuchal texts may have used it as a heuristic device to express sentiments about identity within a particular worldview.

In all of the theorists cited so far there is a distinct tendency to construct dualisms for the purpose of definition. Williams himself says that his categories overlap.<sup>596</sup> At first, categories or dichotomies may be helpful to order our knowledge and to assess it, but this way of assessing realities may end up excluding those phenomena that are hybrids or that take explicit pleasure in transgressing boundaries (I am foreshadowing my reading of the Nephilim as cyborgs in Donna Haraway's sense below).

### **7.2.3. Mythological questions are already answered**

Atwood puts ancient myth and SF into a family resemblance relationship, but she seems to contradict Suvin's distinction of myth and SF. She, too, compares the genres by the questions the texts are dealing with. Suvin writes,

[SF] does not ask about The Man or The World, but which man?: in which kind of world?: and why such a man in such a kind of world? As a literary genre, SF is just as opposed to supernatural estrangement as to empiricism (naturalism).<sup>597</sup>

Myth, according to him, asks about "The Man" or "The World". Atwood, on the other hand, sees myth and SF addressing the same fundamental questions, such as "Where did the world come from? ... Where did people come from? [...] Where did OUR people come from?" or questions about theodicy

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<sup>595</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>596</sup> "It will of course be clear that these types often overlap. Indeed the overlap and often the confusion between (c) ["the willed transformation"] and (d) ["technological transformation"] are exceptionally significant." Ibid., 220.

<sup>597</sup> Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," 374.

such as “Why do bad things happen to good people?” and “Why do good things happen to bad people?”<sup>598</sup>

Here, I agree with Suvin more than with Atwood. The questions SF texts address are most of the time extrapolated from a situation in which the more basic mythical questions are either implicitly already answered or not addressed. The concepts “Man” and “World” exist in SF, but it does not necessarily address their coming about. SF texts more frequently address hypothetical questions such as, “What if The World we know encountered another world?”<sup>599</sup> or “What if The Man invents a concept to control other men and women?”<sup>600</sup> Atwood is right that basic questions are addressed in SF, but most of the time the mythological solutions to these questions already exist as a basis for extrapolation.

The Bible, especially Genesis to 2 Samuel as Thompson remarks, is concerned with questions of origin, and its stories contain both basic mythological questions and more sophisticated questions, as those in Suvin’s examples. “The central plots of these books and their major parts relate to origin, answering in one way or another how Israel and its world came to be.”<sup>601</sup>

If we take Numbers 13 as an example text of a biblical piece of SF, the basic mythological question of “How did the World/the Man come to be?” is already answered by Genesis. So is the other basic question of “Why should these people obey YHWH?” which is answered in the stories about establishing the covenant. Numbers 13 can now address the SF questions of world-juxtaposition and identity-confirmation in the encounter with the Other: “What if the people who are in a covenant with YHWH encountered other people who worship other gods?”

#### **7.2.4. The Bible’s narrative world is different from our own**

Rabkin’s definition of science fiction is this:

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<sup>598</sup> Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 51.

<sup>599</sup> As in Arthur C. Clarke, *Rendezvous with Rama* (London: Gollancz, 2006), Carl Sagan, *Contact* (London: Arrow, 2009), Le Guin, *The Lathe Of Heaven*.

<sup>600</sup> As in Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber, 2006), Zamyatin, *We*, George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harlow: Longman, 1991), Moore et al., *V for Vendetta*.

<sup>601</sup> Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People*, 354.



[...] a work belongs in the genre of science fiction if its narrative world is at least somewhat different from our own, and if that difference is apparent against the background of an organized body of knowledge.<sup>602</sup>

This definition can be applied to Numbers 13 in the following way. The biblical narrative world is different to our own (today's world). I mentioned above that I am the alien reader from another time and space coming into the biblical text's world. That connection makes it SF to me already. Organisation of society into tribes or a nomadic lifestyle are features of a different world from my world.

There is another world-juxtaposition within the text. If the Israelites' desert camps are taken as the normal world, the discoveries seen in the Promised Land are different from that normal world. The differences become apparent against the background of knowledge the Israelite spies bring back from their exploration: strong tribes inhabit fortified cities, while the Israelites are nomads. There is easy and abundant food supply in the land, which is juxtaposed with conflicts arising from food, such as the one described in Numbers 11.

Rabkin agrees with Suvin, that what is important in SF

is not the appurtenances of ray guns and lab coats, but the "scientific" habits of mind: the idea that paradigms do control our view of all phenomena, that within these paradigms all normal problems can be solved, and that abnormal occurrences must either be explained or initiate the search for a better (usually more inclusive) paradigm.<sup>603</sup>

If we were to apply this insight to the Bible, we can see once again from the outside, as readers approaching the text in the year 2013, that there is a paradigm in the Bible – covenant, or YHWH's legislation, to which most or all of the text is subjected.

When we look at passages such as Numbers 13 that deal with the encounter with a different paradigm or worldview (the tribes in the land of Canaan which are perceived as "not-us"), we can see that the paradigm presented in the Bible is not open to being replaced with a new, more inclusive paradigm. Those boundary-crossers or converts the Bible mentions are accommodated within the paradigm; it is not changed in order to accommodate them. Recognising this

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<sup>602</sup> Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature*, 119.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid., 121.

difference between the Bible and SF can be very helpful to bring about readings of the Bible that are ethically appropriate to this day and age.

The paradigm I see behind the Bible is obviously not our modern perception of science, scientific progress, the laws of history to sketch alternative histories, or knowledge of anthropology to sketch alternative anthropologies.<sup>604</sup> Rather, the overarching paradigm of the Bible is YHWH. In Numbers 13 we can find additional paradigms that co-exist with this overarching paradigm: the encounter with the Anakites or Nephilim, the mythological giants, fits into paradigmatic bodies of knowledges too. The Nephilim have appeared in biblical “history” before, just before the Great Flood, so they are not an unexpected novum.

#### **7.2.5. Numbers 13 contains an alternate world and a possibility in the “not-yet”**

Roland Boer has drawn upon Suvin, Marin, and Jameson to read Chronicles as utopia and science fiction. There is a strong emphasis on showing that any Bible reading is as convincing (or unconvincing) as one that reads the Bible as SF. Boer says that these readings are “formally no different to Noth’s proposed ‘Deuteronomistic History’.”<sup>605</sup> Since Boer deals with Chronicles in particular, his reading is concerned especially with the construction of alternative timelines, alternative past(s) and future(s).<sup>606</sup>

Boer hints at the important difference between the biblical text as SF and any other SF text: the Bible is often understood as holding not only a topical allusion to *a* reality (maybe the late Persian period), but believers may understand it as holding topical allusions to their (and therefore *all*) realities: “The most interesting point [...] is that the alternate world of science fiction is analogous to the yet to be realized possibilities of the context of the addressee.”<sup>607</sup>

Numbers 13 constructs an alternate world both from the point of view of its original intended audience and from the point of view of a modern-day audience. SF and utopia converge here, because this alternate world contains the

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<sup>604</sup> These examples are given by Rabkin (Ibid.) for paradigms SF can undermine.

<sup>605</sup> Boer, *Novel Histories*, 154–155.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

(Blochian) unrealised possibilities in the “not-yet”. One possibility of Numbers 13 is the attainment of a Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. This is a possibility in the “not-yet” of all its addressees. Numbers 13, moreover, contains implicit instructions on how to attain the supposed utopia: not murmuring against YHWH. The possibility of the Promised Land is one of the “yet to be realized possibilities” in the Zero World of anyone who feels addressed.<sup>608</sup>

#### **7.2.6. Summary: utopia, SF, and the Bible**

Some concepts from SF theory appear to be transferable to the Bible. There are discontinuities which appear in this comparison of course. Suvin’s novum is thought of as a concept applied in SF with scientific rigour. The notion of “scientific rigour” would not exist in the Bible itself, but the way the laws are given and applied within the text show a close family resemblance to it. Suvin’s estrangement is particularly applicable to readers of the Bible. We can speculate whether the intended audience would have felt cognitive estrangement when confronted with the biblical texts. This is likely, since the original audience would not have lived in a Promised Land. A critical reader, not religiously committed to the “Truth” of the Bible, might feel a sense of cognitive estrangement looking in on a text from a far removed time and place.

Williams’ four categories show that while having a limited number of strict categories makes criticism quite neat, there might be too much overlap between categories to justify drawing their boundaries by specific characteristics. Although such a framework of a small number of categories can be helpful, it might not always be the best way forward, because we end up testing the categories by using them on an example, rather than learning more about an example by applying the categories. In the end, we might say more about Williams’ categories and less about Numbers 13 or the Bible and its readers. If we read the imagined Promised Land under divine rule as a “willed transformation” in William’s sense, more family resemblances between the Bible and SF appear. We also find another discontinuity, which is Williams’

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<sup>608</sup> Michael Walzer describes the impact of a biblical story on a variety of communities who would see themselves as “addressees” of the biblical text in Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*. Edward Said reviewed Walzer’s book and pointed out that the possibility of electing certain stories from the Bible as guidelines in reality (and disregarding others) can be precarious: Said, “Michael Walzer’s ‘Exodus and Revolution’: A Canaanite Reading.”

“technological transformation”. Similarly to Suvin’s scientifically rigorous novum a “technological transformation” should not be expected to be found in the Bible. There is a certain likeness if we were to see entering into a covenant with YHWH as similar to the introduction of a technological change into society.

Atwood and Suvin both address questions about SF and myth that are of importance to a reading of the Bible as SF. Mythological questions about the origin of humankind and the origin of the earth are not usually addressed in SF because they are already answered. Certain Bible passages would be mythological to a higher degree than they would be SF. I would see biblical passages about the creation, the Great Flood, or the tower of Babel as mythological to a higher degree than SF. By being included in the progression of the biblical story, they enable readings of later passages as SF because the more basic mythological questions are answered there. My conclusion from discussing the differences in Suvin’s and Atwood’s ideas about myth and SF is that SF and myth do not exclude one another but simply address different questions. The world-juxtaposition we often find in SF is as crucial to expressing identity, tradition, culture, and belief by projecting it against an Other, as similar themes addressed in creation myths, foundation myths, or national myths.

Rabkin’s texts about SF show yet another discontinuity between modern SF and biblical SF. Rabkin says that SF challenges and undermines existing paradigms. The Bible does not do this. The paradigm of YHWH is followed through; those who challenge it are punished. It would almost seem that the biblical stories are anti-science fiction. However, many of the paradigms presented in the Bible (Leviticus’ laws, for example) as leading to a Promised Land or heaven, are not applicable in the contemporary world. Imagining them to be implemented in contemporary reality results in realising how estranged these biblical paradigms are in the experienced reality of a contemporary reader.

Finally, seeing SF as portraying an alternate world through which an addressee visualises possibilities for her or his future, allows us to see that the Bible can be SF, because it does describe an alternate world and that it contains the potential to inspire change, which can be considered a utopian feature.

### 7.3. *Reading science fiction in Numbers 13*

A text changes depending on where, when, and by whom it is read. Suvin calls this the “‘Pierre Menard’ syndrome or law”.<sup>609</sup> Jameson expresses the same idea when speaking about the genesis of utopias and utopian thought:

Few [other literary forms] have so openly required cross-reference and debate within each new variant: who can read Morris without Bellamy? Or indeed Bellamy without Morris? So it is that the individual text carries with it a whole tradition, reconstructed and modified with each new addition [...].<sup>610</sup>

If the Bible is seen as a document of significant cultural impact, SF literature, TV, and film has a similar cultural impact. I would modify Jameson’s rhetorical question “who can read Morris without Bellamy?” for the Bible and the present chapter in this way: “Who can read the Bible without *Star Trek*?” Because, to put it with Frye: “In an age of science fiction Ezekiel’s vision of a chariot of ‘wheels within wheels’ seems more relevant if what he saw was a spaceship from another planet [...].”<sup>611</sup>

Above I have argued that the Bible as a whole can be considered SF if we use the right theorists to support that idea. What follows is a practical application of specific SF examples to the case study passage Numbers 13: I will bring the “latest additions” to the tradition of the Bible into a dialogue with the biblical text.

The latest additions will be drawn from *Star Trek*, Stanislaw Lem’s novels *His Master’s Voice* and *Solaris*, the Strugatsky brothers’ novel *Roadside Picnic*, Jameson’s *Archaeologies of the Future*, Carl Sagan’s novel *Contact*, Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*, and Baum *et al*’s paper on contact scenarios with an extra-terrestrial intelligence (ETI). These texts are all distinctly post-industrial, post-colonial, post-World War II, or post-modern (or reflexively modern, depending on one’s chosen terminology). The Bible is just as “post” when read in the environment of the year 2013, with contemporary knowledge and debates inseparable from our Bible readings. In addition, these SF texts

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<sup>609</sup> Suvin, “Theses on Dystopia 2001,” 190.

<sup>610</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 2.

<sup>611</sup> Frye, *The Great Code*, 44.

have in common with the Bible that at their core they are (still and again) about negotiating and defining identities and coming to terms with dichotomies and paradoxes in the encounter with those who are thought of as not sharing one's identity.

### **7.3.1. Passages of Numbers 13 to be discussed in terms of their SF resemblances**

Four concrete aspects of Numbers 13 will be read with their SF family resemblances, testing the passage's and the SF pieces' strategies in shaping and testing an identity.

In Numbers 13:4-15 we are dealing with biblical "Red Shirts", expendable characters that serve to highlight the narrative surrounding the main characters. I will introduce this motif known from *Star Trek*, refer to its use in John Scalzi's novel *Redshirts* and show how its biblical parallel tells a story about right and wrong behaviour while preparing the scene for the main characters' rise to fame.

The Nephilim of Numbers 13 can be brought into a dialogue with Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto". Haraway's critique of dualisms will resonate with the "us-them" dualities constructed in the Bible, especially in the figures of the Nephilim, who are interpreted as hybrid beings, which sustain a dualism instead of resolving it. The presence of hybridity is a threat to the newly constructed monotheistic YHWH-following identity. A reading of the Nephilim-cyborgs with *Star Trek*'s Borg will pre-empt the first aspect of the conclusion of this chapter, which is that the Bible is very similar to *Star Trek* in its juxtaposing a known world with encounters with Others and in its relying on familiar motifs.

In Numbers 13:32 the spies view their situation as a contact scenario with much stronger tribes. Atwood has written about the way SF literature tests and evaluates identities by putting protagonists into a situation in which they encounter the Other. Outside of SF very similar concepts were introduced by Simmel and Cooley, on whom I will draw to underline that there are real encounters underlying fictional encounters. Seth Baum plays through contact scenarios with extra-terrestrial intelligences, in the encounter with which one's own limitations and comparative insignificance becomes obvious. I point out that the sinful behaviour of the spies in this passage is due to attributing

devastating power to a stranger, thereby giving authority to a point of view that is not the one endorsed in this passage.

Finally, I look at the representation of the Other both in SF and in the passages Numbers 13:28-29, Numbers 13:22, and Numbers 13:33. These passages mention Anakites (and the association of them with the Nephilim) and other tribes. *Star Trek*'s "deep-space multiculturalism"<sup>612</sup> and the approach found in this TV series to well-known and unknown strangers can help to read these passages.

Biblical studies can be read with SF novels which ask questions about the general ability to recognise the Other. If we see the Bible as a message from another time and place, like the messages received in the novels by Lem and Sagan, we will see that attitudes towards the Bible in scholarship are similar to the attitudes expressed in the philosophical SF by Lem, the Strugatsky brothers, and Sagan: some understand the Bible as essentially knowable, some see it as a mirror that simply reflects back our own culture of interpretation.

### **7.3.2. The spies are Red Shirts**

A striking element of Numbers 13 is the comparatively long sequence in which we are introduced to the spying party. Numbers 13:4-16 lists the names and tribes of each member of the spying team, including the surviving spies Joshua and Caleb.<sup>613</sup> Joshua and Caleb become protagonists in the conquest narratives of the book of Joshua. The fate of the remaining 10 spies, introduced by name and tribal affiliation in Numbers 13, is this:

Num 14:36. And the men whom Moses sent to survey the land, who returned and who caused the whole community to cry out against him by spreading false rumours about the land –

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<sup>612</sup> This expression is borrowed from the title of Jeffrey A. Weinstock, "Freaks in Space: 'Extraterrestrialism' and 'Deep-Space Multiculturalism,'" in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 327–337.

<sup>613</sup> A reading of the list not inclined to use this anachronistic cross-comparison with a *Star Trek* trope, might follow Noth in reading the list as placed here by P and observe with Van Seters that P uses lists as a prominent device: "The list of defeated kings on both sides of the Jordan in chapter 12 [of Joshua] does not contain anything that is distinctive of the Dtr source, and I agree with Mowinkel that it is from the hand of P. It could be explained only as corresponding to P's love of lists, which he displays so prominently throughout the Pentateuch." Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 329.

v. 37. the men who had spread evil false rumours, died of plague before YHWH.

v. 38. Of the men who surveyed the land, Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived.

The names of the ten spies who die of plague later on, are *hapax legomena*. Since these characters do not have a role that precedes or exceeds their short appearance in Numbers 13 and the brief mentioning of their punishment and death in Numbers 14, and their function seems to be to highlight the behaviour and attitudes of certain other protagonist characters, they can be understood as biblical Red Shirts.

*Star Trek: The Original Series (TOS)* introduced a recurring character trope, now often called Red Shirt.<sup>614</sup> Crew member characters wearing the red *TOS* uniform would be introduced, sometimes by name, only to perish later in the same episode. Scalzi's novel titled *Redshirts* posits that the function of these characters is primarily to give the main characters – those credited in the opening sequence of the show – a reason to display an emotional reaction. I would want to add that their deaths, which often occur on missions on a planet's surface or in the encounter with an alien life form, also serve to demonstrate the *modus operandi* of a particular antagonist.

The Red Shirts of Numbers 13 exist to highlight the “correct” behaviour of the protagonists and serve as another example of how YHWH behaves when the community “mutters”. Numbers 13 contains a statement about right and wrong behaviour. The ten spies are punished for slandering the Promised Land and for doubting that conquest is possible with help of YHWH. The main characters Joshua and Caleb, who do indeed participate in the conquest of the Promised Land in later episodes, behave correctly by having faith in the conquest mission. This appears especially clearly against the dissident behaviour of the Red Shirt spies.

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<sup>614</sup> See <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/RedShirt>. Accessed 16th August, 2013. For pop cultural works referring to this trope, see, for example John Scalzi, *Redshirts*, Kindle Edition (London: Gollancz, 2012). The trope is alluded to in J.J. Abrams, *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (Paramount, 2013) on more than one occasion.



### 7.3.3. The Nephilim are cyborgs

Numbers 13:32 and 33 read:

v. 32. “[...] The land, in which we travelled around to spy it out, is a land that eats those who dwell in it, and all the people we saw in it were men of large stature.

v. 33. And we saw the Nephilim there – the sons of Anak are kin of the Nephilim and we seemed like grasshoppers to ourselves and so we seemed to them too.”<sup>615</sup>

The ten dystopian spies present the “sons of Anak”, who were mentioned earlier in the passage (Num 13:22), as related to the Nephilim, those ambiguous beings mentioned in Genesis 6:4: “The Nephilim were on earth in those days and also after that, when the sons of the gods [lit.] came to the daughters of man, and they bore them [Nephilim] to them [sons of gods].” This part of the spies’ statement is characterised as an evil rumour (Num 13:32). The community’s reaction to this rumour is to propose going back to Egypt (Num 14:2-4), and the spies are punished by death for spreading this rumour and causing the community to rebel once again (Num 14:36). In the re-telling of Numbers 13 in Deuteronomy 1:22-28, the reference to the Nephilim is not included, only Anakites are mentioned (Deut 1:28).

I am going to approach the Nephilim of Numbers 13 relying on the premise that they exist in this text to express the presence of a sustained dualism, in which the failure of clearly defined categories is to be seen as a threat. I am going to argue that the Nephilim are cyborgs in Donna Haraway’s sense<sup>616</sup> and that they are a threat within a monist perspective because they defy or transgress categorisation. They can be used to critique the idea of a biblically inspired utopia, because it can be shown that this utopia would not have space to accommodate boundary-crossers.

Haraway’s critique begins by exposing the original myths at the base of Marxism and psychoanalysis, as Garden of Eden-type narratives:

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<sup>615</sup> My translation.

<sup>616</sup> “A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. [...] Contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs – creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted.” Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” 149.

Hilary Klein has argued that both Marxism and psychoanalysis, in their concepts of labour and of individuation and gender formation, depend on the plot of original unity out of which difference must be produced and enlisted in a drama of escalating domination of woman/nature. The cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense.<sup>617</sup>

The cyborg-Nephilim of Numbers 13 do not originate within the Garden of Eden myth of original unity as the Israelite protagonists do. The protagonists are linked back to the Garden of Eden, the patriarchs, and the covenant stories by giving their tribal affiliations.

The Nephilim, which these protagonists of the progressive storyline encounter in their supposed Promised Land (the next step in their “drama of escalating domination”), do not depend on an origin myth, because they are constructs of both “imagination and material reality.”<sup>618</sup> As I said above, in this science fiction story mythological questions are already answered: Nephilim are not descended from the original humans. They were, from the start, creatures of fact and fiction, combining two elements, not unlike a cyborg combining the natural and the technological: the Nephilim are described as the offspring of the sons of the gods and human women.

Like cyborgs, they are “committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity.”<sup>619</sup> Their replication is “uncoupled from organic reproduction.”<sup>620</sup> Since they are fact-fiction hybrids, they are not organic. They are partial gods, partial humans, there has been intimacy with human women, and through this breach of boundaries, they are definite symbols of perversity.

Numbers 13 sits at the centre of a salvation story about liberation, chosenness, and progress that depends on the one most important foundation myth or origin story in Western culture, the Garden of Eden. The Nephilim-cyborgs disrupt this story: “The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust.”<sup>621</sup> In the middle of the

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<sup>617</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid., 151.

biblical wave-form story of progressions towards new utopias, “[t]he cyborg incarnation is outside of salvation history.”<sup>622</sup>

Haraway criticises the “deepened dualisms of mind and body, animal and machine, idealism and materialism in the social practices, symbolic formulations, and physical artefacts associated with ‘high technology’ and scientific culture.”<sup>623</sup> Basically, as I think I have made clear in chapter 6 on utopia and dystopia, the biblical passage presents a unified vision of a doctrine or ideology by juxtaposing two different perspectives, or two different outcomes. As such, it plays with dualisms, but its solution is not to accommodate a sustained state of dualism. Its explicit and often repeated endorsement is to do away with one side.

Haraway writes that,

[f]rom another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.<sup>624</sup>

The Nephilim are one point in the biblical story that conveys clearly that such personified “contradictory standpoints” are not acceptable, and that there is a need for monist, unified, homogenous perspective. In the ideal world-to-be that Numbers 13 proposes, the boundary-crosser will be eliminated. The Nephilim, when read with Haraway as a personification of dualisms (divine and human, divine but outside salvation history, perverse but not slain for it), have a negative connotation in the biblical world as conveyed through narrator and/or characters.

Haraway embraces the categorilessness of the cyborg and argues for a more accommodating vision than simple dualisms. “This chapter is an argument for the *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction.”<sup>625</sup> Reading the Nephilim in the year 2013 as cyborgs might be the best way to read them. At the same time such a reading warns of accepting uncritically the underlying endorsement of eradicating that which cannot be

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<sup>622</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid., 150.

categorised simply and immediately. The cyborg-Nephilim personify a transgressed boundary and an opening-up of categories and dualisms. Their presence is clearly not desired in the biblical Promised Land. With the help of the Nephilim-as-cyborgs we can critique an idea of a biblically inspired Promised Land, which, like the land of Canaan, does not allow for the diversity of pleurably confused boundaries.

The Bible is a lot more like *Star Trek* than Haraway in its treatment of embodied dualisms. The cyborg species from *Star Trek*, the Borg, who exist as a collective and assimilate the distinctive traits of all species they encounter into themselves, are a classic enemy to the protagonists. In *Star Trek and Philosophy*<sup>626</sup> we read about Hegel's Absolute Spirit idea and its implication that perfection or the Absolute Spirit might exist "when we see other persons and parts of the world as necessarily connected and not as opposed to or different from us."<sup>627</sup>

In a *Star Trek: Voyager* episode titled "The Omega Directive", the ship encounters a molecule called the Omega particle. The highly classified Omega Directive requires the destruction of this molecule, because it could become devastatingly harmful to (*Star Trek*) society and technology. The character Seven-of-Nine, a former Borg drone, feels connected to the Omega particle because it is "infinitely complex, yet harmonious" and consists of "infinite parts functioning as one."<sup>628</sup> The article from *Star Trek and Philosophy* does not mention that this harmonious coexistence of complex parts is a threat in this episode. In this sense, *Star Trek* is very much like the Bible in portraying the sustained and accepted dualism as something that is threatening and ought to be destroyed.<sup>629</sup>

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<sup>626</sup> Jason T. Eberl and Kevin S. Decker, *Star Trek and Philosophy: The Wrath of Kant* (Chicago: Open Court, 2008).

<sup>627</sup> Kevin S. Decker, "Inhuman Nature, or What's It Like to Be a Borg?," in *Star Trek and Philosophy: The Wrath of Kant* (Chicago: Open Court, 2008), 141.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>629</sup> There is another way of bringing the Borg into the biblical text. On the one hand, one can look at them as "what they are" (cyborgs, boundary-crossers, unresolved personified dualisms that are the ultimate enemy), but they also resonate in Numbers 13 by "what they do": assimilation. One aspect of the threat, which the land explored in Numbers 13 poses is that it "devours its inhabitants" (Num 13:32). My interpretation of this phrase as threatening to assimilate, that is, to devour the spies' and the community's identity, is enabled by Ilana Pardes. Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel*, 112.

#### 7.3.4. Contact scenario with grasshoppers

Returning to Numbers 13:32.33:

v. 32. “[...] The land, in which we travelled around to spy it out, is a land that eats those who dwell in it, and all the people we saw in it were men of large stature.

v. 33. And we saw the Nephilim there – the sons of Anak are kin of the Nephilim and we seemed like grasshoppers to ourselves and so we seemed to them too.”

In an encounter with a more powerful stranger, the spies turn into grasshoppers. Does this mean that they consider themselves to be a protein-rich snack, a swarm-morph threat to agriculture, or a creature so non-human and insignificant that it is easily crushed and trampled?

One function of SF literature, according to Margaret Atwood, is to test one’s sense of self through comparing oneself to another:

If you image – or imagine – yourself, you can image – or imagine – a being not-yourself; and you can also imagine how such a being may see the world, a world that includes you. [...] To the imagined being, you may look like a cherished loved one or a potential friend, or you may look like a tasty dinner or a bitter enemy.<sup>630</sup>

SF allows us to play through hypothetical scenarios of contacts with absolute strangers. Some strangers, according to Simmel, are a positive influence on a group. Their objectivity allows a group to define itself more clearly. This positive stranger is “an element of the group itself – an element whose membership within the group involves both being outside it and confronting it.”<sup>631</sup> However, if one takes away the connection forged by common humanity, one is no longer talking about a stranger one is connected to: “[...] here the expression ‘the stranger’ no longer has any positive meaning. The relation with him is a non-relation [...]”<sup>632</sup> According to the spies, there is no a bond of common humanity. They are grasshoppers in the eyes of the strangers, which were just identified with primeval giants.

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<sup>630</sup> Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 21.

<sup>631</sup> Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, 144.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

A useful concept when looking at this grasshopper comparison is Cooley's Looking-Glass Self.<sup>633</sup> One is self-conscious especially with regard to thoughts of others: the idea of self is “determined by the attitude toward this attributed to that other mind. A social self of this sort might be called the reflected or looking-glass self.”<sup>634</sup> To Cooley there are three elements to this Looking-Glass Self: a) the imagination of our appearance to the other person b) the imagination of the other person’s judgment of our appearance and c) a self-feeling, such as pride or mortification. Mortification is probably the affect most clearly expressed in the grasshopper comparison here.

This statement is about negotiating and gauging one’s own identity in the encounter with the stranger. In this SF reading of Numbers 13, the strangers that appear are dehumanised and throw back a mirror image of the protagonists as dehumanised: they turn into grasshoppers in the encounter with the mirroring stranger. Which outcomes can we expect in this biblical contact scenario and what are the implications for our understanding of this passage and its applicability?

Baum *et al*’s paper “Would Contact with Extraterrestrials Benefit or Harm Humanity? A Scenario Analysis”<sup>635</sup> uses examples from SF and anthropology about “first contacts” to speculate about possible outcomes in an encounter between humans and an extra-terrestrial intelligence (ETI).<sup>636</sup> In the statement about looking like grasshoppers the Bible essentially delivers an example of a contact scenario analysis which considers the result for the protagonist community. Baum *et al* divide possible contact scenarios into the general categories of beneficial to humanity, of neutral effect to humanity, and harmful to humanity. Each scenario is subdivided again.<sup>637</sup>

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<sup>633</sup> Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>635</sup> Seth D. Baum, Jacob D. Haqq-Misra, and Shawn D. Domagal-Goldman, “Would Contact With Extraterrestrials Benefit or Harm Humanity? A Scenario Analysis,” *Acta Astronautica* 68, no. 11–12 (2011): 2114–2129. File version, which was used here, from 22 April, 2011 retrieved from <http://sethbaum.com/ac/>.

<sup>636</sup> Baum *et al* quote geographer Jared Diamond when introducing the harmful “selfish ETI” scenario. Diamond, quoted by Baum *et al*: ““A less pleasant prospect is that the extraterrestrials might behave the way we intelligent beings have behaved whenever we have discovered other previously unknown intelligent beings on earth, like unfamiliar humans or chimpanzees and gorillas. Just as we did to those beings, the extraterrestrials might proceed to kill, infect, dissect, conquer, displace or enslave us, stuff us as specimens for their museums or pickle our skulls and use us for medical research.”” *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>637</sup> See Fig.1 in *Ibid.*, 9.

The undesirable outcome of being purposely eaten or accidentally crushed by a more powerful Other appears in the biblical text, in the grasshopper reference.<sup>638</sup> In Baum's sense, three scenarios could be implied by the grasshopper statement, all of which see the stranger as more powerful and more advanced: a) a neutral scenario, in which the "grasshopper" is so insignificant to the powerful stranger, that it goes unnoticed,<sup>639</sup> b) an intentionally harmful scenario, in which the stranger devours or enslaves for its own selfish interests,<sup>640</sup> or c) an unintentionally harmful scenario,<sup>641</sup> in which the stranger accidentally tramples the insignificant human (or Israelite).

Why the ten spies are considered deviants for suggesting any or all of these three scenarios becomes clear when one takes into account the supported ideology of belief and trust in YHWH. All three scenarios attribute much greater power to the stranger than to oneself. In scenario a), the community led by YHWH is simply ignored. Scenario b) is the most overtly harmful one, which attributes god-like powers to the rival. But scenario c) is the most crushing one. The Israelite community and YHWH are so insignificant that they are accidentally crushed, not even given the status of a worthy enemy.

There is a beneficial outcome to this contact scenario as well, which is the one defended by Caleb and Joshua, the faithful spies. As I have pointed out, though, the outcome is not beneficial to both sides in the encounter. The stranger

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<sup>638</sup> This thought was inspired by a reference found in Jameson *Archaeologies of the Future*, speaking once again about *Roadside Picnic*: "Aliens are neither benevolent nor malevolent, despite the dialectic rehearsed in books like Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1950) or James Blish's *Case of Conscience* (1959). Specks or blips on the margins of the alien's field of vision, we are invisible to them, or at best indifferent, a situation that does not exclude grim accidents. *Roadside Picnic*, indeed, tells the story of one such extraterrestrial accident. Yet the extraordinary density of the Strugatsky's little novel is to be explained by the variety of humans and human groups who bring their limited thought processes, and their varying interests, to bear on this space [...]." Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 73. Once again, the final statement is that the only concrete statement that can be made after much epistemological searching is about humans and their relationships with each other, not a statement made about humans and their Other.

<sup>639</sup> "Even if they took no extraordinary measures to remain concealed, ETI that pass by Earth may draw as much attention from humans as a passing-by scuba diver would alert a sea anemone by taking a photograph." Baum, Haqq-Misra, and Domagal-Goldman, "Would Contact With Extraterrestrials Benefit or Harm Humanity? A Scenario Analysis," 15.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>641</sup> "One non-biological physical hazard that we could face from direct contact with ETI is unintentional mechanical harm. For example, ETI might accidentally crush us while attempting an unrelated maneuver. This scenario parallels instances on Earth in which humans inadvertently destroy the ecosystems of species that then go extinct." *Ibid.*, 24.

has to be eradicated first, but then their material assets will be inherited, their cities and their land.

#### 7.4. *The Bible is a known or unknown Other*

“One has to recover that excluded middle between the opposing notions that texts are either unknowable or possessed of an innate meaning”, Geoghegan writes about different attitudes brought to the Bible,<sup>642</sup> and Robert Carroll reminds us not to forget or under-estimate the Bible’s “alien qualities”.<sup>643</sup> As I have explored at length, the Bible – especially in diachronic perspective – is both unknowable and possesses such an “innate meaning” for many of its readers. My final reading of the Bible as encountered in today’s world by an unpredictable audience explores the “more than two-ness” of another seeming dichotomy. Are the Bible and its many aliens knowable, unknowable, or both?

I have mentioned above (in 6.4) that the Nephilim/Anakites could be considered a fantastic image. Reading from a modern perspective and taking into account rabbinic<sup>644</sup> and pop cultural<sup>645</sup> references to these figures, they are fairly well established as being thought of as a race of giants. In Numbers 13 they are mentioned more frequently than the other tribes.<sup>646</sup> While the Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, and Canaanites are Other in being not-Israelite, they are not alien, as the Nephilim.

On *Star Trek*, there are recurring characters that are humanoid, but not terrestrial. They are characterised as possessing a few distinguishing characteristics: they might be concerned with honour and warfare (Klingons), primarily concerned with gaining wealth (Ferengi), or have elected logic and strict reason as a guiding principle that shapes society in their culture (Vulcan).

*Star Trek* can be and has been<sup>647</sup> criticised for displaying an ethnocentric and generalising perspective in the portrayal of the Other. I agree that

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<sup>642</sup> Geoghegan, “Religious Narrative, Post-Secularism and Utopia,” 215.

<sup>643</sup> Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold*, 9.

<sup>644</sup> For example in Numbers Rabbah, *Shelah* or Rashi’s commentary on Numbers 13:33.

<sup>645</sup> For example in Douglas Rushkoff, *Akedah*, Testament 1 (New York: Vertigo, 2006).

<sup>646</sup> I have dealt with this in Uhlenbruch, “Numbers 13 - by Gene Roddenberry.”

<sup>647</sup> Weinstock, “Freaks in Space.” David Greven, “The Twilight of Identity: Enterprise, Neoconservatism, and the Death of Star Trek,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 50 (2008), <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc50.2008/StarTrekEnt/text.html>. Accessed 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2013.



“depictions of aliens in SF texts can tell us a great deal about the extent to which a given culture values and fears human difference and diversity.”<sup>648</sup> However, in addition to attributing this discursive potential to the trope of the alien in texts (not only in SF, but also in the Bible), it is also possible to read the representation of the Other on *Star Trek* or elsewhere more indifferently, like Thomas Disch.

Disch writes that *Star Trek* is not innovative literary SF at its best, but that it is “‘bland’ and ‘repetitious’”, for the simple reason that “comfort is a major desideratum in bedtime stories”.<sup>649</sup> *Star Trek* caters to a specific audience and relies on simple recurring tropes, because it is not meant to be challenging. It has to tell stories, so it has to employ easily recognisable cyphers for difference, good/evil, and Other: “Good people leading wholesome lives in conflict-free polities are not the stuff novels are made of.”<sup>650</sup> Maybe the portrayal of the alien is a sophisticated reflection of how human diversity is perceived in a given culture, maybe the alien is an image that is carried through a literary tradition simply because without it, there would be no exciting story.

The known aliens from *Star Trek*, for example, the Vulcans, Ferengi, or Klingons, are recognisable by specific characteristics. They correspond to the Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, and Canaanites of Numbers 13. These tribes are not Israelite, but they are known. Amalekites, for example, are associated with conflicts.<sup>651</sup> The Anakites/Nephilim are a lesser known Other in this passage and are much more difficult to categorise.

*Star Trek* introduces a number of unknown Others, whose characteristics (good/evil, friend/foe) must be established first, though the unknown is never so alien as to be unrecognisable. *Star Trek* aliens are represented using simple categories, in line with the “bed-time story” (Disch) they are intended to tell; there is no heavy philosophical discourse about knowability or representation of total alterity.

The *Star Trek* “unknowns” Species 8472 are an embodied sentient species. The unknown aliens encountered in the episode “Schisms” are also

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<sup>648</sup> Weinstock, “Freaks in Space,” 330.

<sup>649</sup> Thomas M Disch, *The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of: How Science Fiction Conquered The World* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 100.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>651</sup> Gen 14.6-8, Judg 16.32-34, and especially Num 14.43-45.

anthropomorphic figures and communicate audibly. The Borg are anthropomorphic machine-biological hybrids, different especially in being a collective rather than individuals. Often entire episodes are dedicated to finding out whether an unknown Other is harmful or peaceful, whereas the viewer of *Star Trek* knows exactly what to expect if Klingons are encountered.<sup>652</sup>

A Bible reader may have clearer expectations of the Amalekites than the Anakites, although both are featured elsewhere in the Bible's universe. In this sense, the Anakites are the Borg of the Bible. The Borg are not featured in too many episodes of *Star Trek*, but when they appear they attract the focus of an entire episode. The Anakites appear occasionally in the Bible, but when they do, they draw a lot of attention, both of protagonists like in Numbers 13, and of commentators and biblical scholars.

Numbers 13's Others are Others that tell us about value and fear of human diversity (see above, Weinstock) and/or they are Others that simply tell us why and how stories work (see above, Disch). They are not images that carry and convey a discourse about total alterity or the knowability of the absolute stranger. However, I argue in the following that these images become part of a discussion about just that – the knowability of the past, the past as the absolutely strange, and meaning as a potential totally Other, if we not only take into account a superficial and playful comparison between *Star Trek*'s Borg and the Anakites, but also compare SF discourse on total alterity to the Bible in the contemporary world.

My argument is structured in the following way. First, I am going to introduce SF texts that deal with alterity, meaning, and knowability: Stanislaw Lem and the Strugatsky brothers, informed by Jameson's discussions of these works, and Carl Sagan. I shall outline the perspective these works take on our ability to recognise the absolutely strange. After outlining how these novels work, I shall reiterate that the Bible does not talk about unknowability, but

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<sup>652</sup> Some examples of unknown Others on *Star Trek* are Species 8472, a previously unknown species featured in *Star Trek: Voyager* episodes "Scorpion", "Scorpion, Part II", "In the Flesh", "Someone to Watch Over Me". Source: [http://en.memory-alpha.org/wiki/Species\\_8472](http://en.memory-alpha.org/wiki/Species_8472) (Accessed April 3rd, 2013); an intelligent black tar puddle named Armus in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode "Skin of Evil"; the first encounters with the Borg collective especially in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode "Q Who"; the previously unknown aliens from the episode "Schisms" from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

rather, that we can draw a specific perspective on identity from the Bible's juxtaposition of self and Other.

Once this is established, I will raise the question if the Bible is an Other in today's world – something that helps define identities or something so alien that dialogue with it is impossible – and whether Sagan and Lem's works actually offer a way to understand the relationship between the utopian and dystopian potential that is united in the Bible. I shall conclude this subchapter by saying that the case study of Numbers 13 (and probably large parts of the Bible) is much more like *Star Trek* in the way it uses established friend/foe relationships and that it is not like philosophical SF. However, after reading philosophical SF and then thinking about the Bible and biblical scholars, we may see that the Bible (or the past in more general terms) might be an absolute Other in contemporary reality; one that seemingly shapes identities in the encounter with it but really does not reflect back anything other than oneself.<sup>653</sup>

In Stanislaw Lem's novel *His Master's Voice* a message of supposedly extra-terrestrial origin is received. A task-force consisting of scientists from different disciplines meet at a secret facility in order to attempt to decode the "message". In the years in which scientists attempt to decode the signal, the corpus of texts written about the signal and its potential meaning grows. The undertaking of attempting to unravel the message turns out to be futile and ends up showing only the interdisciplinary quarrels between ambitious individuals which, at the end of the novel, turn into an international conflict. The message is never decoded and the only impact this message has is to cause frustrations, tensions, and crises. The message is beyond human understanding.

Lem's novel *Solaris* juxtaposes terrestrial civilisation, its epistemologies and discourses, with the environment of a planet covered by a seemingly sentient ocean – Lem's cypher for the absolutely alien. In this novel, too, Lem invents an authoritative corpus and entire libraries of books in different scholarly disciplines which all deal with the sentient ocean. The ocean's actions are not fully understood (or they are misunderstood) by humans, who in turn appear to be misunderstood by the ocean.

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<sup>653</sup> Carroll sees the Bible as completely alien: "The thing written need not be profound but because it is always *other* than oneself its alterity can penetrate consciousness and radically alter how one thinks, behaves or lives." Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold*, 124.

Carl Sagan's novel *Contact* is a conceptual opposite to Lem's novel. A message of extra-terrestrial origin is received, which can be decoded using the universal language of mathematics. The message contains instructions to build a machine. Although there are some struggles between national governments and their respective military branches, receiving an extra-terrestrial message causes world peace, because governments work together towards building the machine. Here the message is both decipherable and essentially peaceful. Extra-terrestrial alterity enables dialogue.

In *Roadside Picnic* by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, the world is affected by the visit from an ETI a long time ago. Left behind were so-called Zones, in which mysterious artefacts are found and the laws of physics are often distorted. Artefacts found in and raided from the Zone are sold among humans. Some artefacts have known functions – some harmless, some harmful, some artefacts are sold merely because they look pretty. The actual purpose of the artefacts is beyond human grasp. It is rumoured that the Zone contains an object that will grant all wishes, which one protagonist attempts to find by all means.

Fredric Jameson speaks about “the unknowability thesis”, especially in the works of Stanislaw Lem, but also in works by the Strugatsky brothers. Jameson describes the signal received in Lem's *His Master's Voice*, in the following way:

[It] stands as a bitter paradigm case of the impossibility of understanding the Other [...]: a signal from outer space that can never be deciphered, yet which stands as a pretext for the most ingenious human conjectures [...] and also offers a projective screen for revealing the most toxic impulses and energies of that planet-bound human race which we are.<sup>654</sup>

The signal oscillates in what it is in theoretical terms. It is something completely alien, undecipherable. But it is described by Lem as a concept that is easily grasped, a radio signal. Now it is not completely alien anymore, but has become an Other in its theoretical sense – something which projects back, as Jameson writes, human behaviour.

The Strugatsky brothers invent mysterious artefacts, forever beyond human understanding. But

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<sup>654</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 108.

[...] genuine difference, genuine alienness or otherness, is impossible and unachievable, and that even there where it seems to have been successfully represented, in reality we find the mere structural play of purely human themes and topics.<sup>655</sup>

Lem's *Solaris*, according to Jameson is "[...] a metaphysical parable of the epistemological relation of the human race to its not-I in general: where that not-I is not merely nature, but another living being."<sup>656</sup>

In Numbers 13 we are definitely not faced with an epistemological discussion about unknowability, but it adds evidence that the "unknowability thesis" holds some truth. We know the tribes, which appear in Numbers 13 well, either from previous battles or from Genesis. Categories are not designed to fail here in the encounter with an unknowable stranger. Categories are designed to reinforce one specific category of identity, which is achieved by mentioning strangers that are just known enough to be known as dangerous to one's own identity, for example by being stronger or worshipping different gods, or who are known to be dangerous because they are an unknowable hybrid creature that crosses boundaries and sustains an uncomfortable dualism.

Interestingly, this seems to be exactly the point Lem is making by attempting to put humans in touch with the radically strange in his fictional work:

[...] humans remain the prisoners of an anthropomorphic philosophical system. They seem unable to judge *Solaris* according to any other coordinates than those of Carl Schmitt – friend or foe – and of Kant himself – pleasure or pain. The conceptual limitation then confirms Lem's ultimate message here, namely that in imagining ourselves to be attempting contact with the radically Other, we are in reality merely looking in a mirror and "searching for an ideal image of our own world."<sup>657</sup>

Sagan's novel, out of the four novels mentioned above that put humans into a hypothetical contact situation with a non-human intelligence, seems to be the only one that draws a positive conclusion about what humans will see when they look into the mirror of a contact situation. I agree with Jameson's suggestion that

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<sup>655</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid., 108–109.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid., 111.

the unifying answer in Lem, the Strugatskys, and Sagan is that humans can only ever get closer to an understanding of themselves by trying to depict an encounter with the absolute Other.

We can look at the Bible as if it were the sentient ocean of *Solaris* and the artefacts that can cause harm, joy, or grant all wishes of *Roadside Picnic*. It could be compared to the message received in *His Master's Voice* (libraries of written words in a variety of disciplines have already been produced about it) and to the message received in *Contact*. Revisiting Suvin:

SF concentrates on possible futures and their spatial equivalents, but it can deal with the present and the past as special cases of a possible historical sequence seen from an estranged point of view (by a figure from another time and/or space).<sup>658</sup>

Anyone reading the Bible today is that figure from another time and/or space. In a contact situation with the Bible, is the Bible essentially recognisable? Can we enter into a dialogue with its alterity or are we only ever talking to ourselves?

Much literature about “first contact” situations would maintain that the only information contained in, for example, early conquest literature is information about the modes of representation current among whoever wrote about the situation.<sup>659</sup> Critical readings of such contact literature would reveal a similar bottom line as Jameson’s observation about Lem’s message. In attempting to describe the Other, we only succeed in seeing ourselves in a mirror.

We could enact a contact scenario between Bible and theologian, Bible and biblical scholar, informed by Bakhtin. Meaning, Bakhtin would say, is generated in a living dialogue.

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-

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<sup>658</sup> Suvin, “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre,” 377.

<sup>659</sup> As already cited above: “We can be certain only that European representations of the New World tell us something about the European practice of representation [...]” Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 7.

ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance, it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue.<sup>660</sup>

Biblical scholarship, in all its different variations and settings, might be – on a Bakhtinian stage – the other participant in the dialogue. Biblical scholarship's words seek to extract an answer from the Bible, about its divine message, its applicability in today's world, its meaning, or the dating and social setting of its composition: "The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction."<sup>661</sup> I would say that there is a difference in expectation about the Bible's ability to live up to the expectation of an answer, but "[u]nderstanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other."<sup>662</sup>

Historicising Bible criticism (such as for example by Hoffmeier<sup>663</sup> and to a lesser extent Noth) views the past and the representation of it in the Bible as essentially recognisable. It expects the Bible to answer back and to create meaning in the dialogue between it and the scholar. Readings such as the one of Noth's commentary on Numbers 13 given in chapter 4 reveal a lot about the person who is writing the commentary, their worldview, and their agenda.

However, if we embark from the pessimistic (Lem) position that the Bible is essentially unrecognisable, and does not answer back, a reading of Noth will end up saying nothing about the Bible and much more about Noth and the state of the discipline at the time of his writing. The interaction between scholar and Bible has become essentially monologic. If we embark from an optimistic (Sagan) position that the Bible contains a message, which can be deciphered in today's world, a reading of Noth will lead to the acceptance that his dialogue with the Bible creates meaning, which is to say, historical truths can be extracted from the Bible.

Some scholars externalise the "unknowability thesis" with regard to the past and the Bible. Many aspects of the Bible are alien objects, whose function

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<sup>660</sup> M. M Bakhtin, V. N Voloshinov, and P. N Medvedev, *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, and Voloshinov*, ed. Pam Morris (London; New York: E. Arnold, 1994), 76.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

<sup>663</sup> Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai*.

scholars are still investigating: “Why – for what purpose or function – were such texts written? The answer to this question may not be singular or univocal for most of the traditions.”<sup>664</sup>

The Strugatskys put their character Kirill, a scientist, into an encounter situation with a specific kind of alien object found in the Zone. Kirill calls these objects “empties” and has been tasked with investigating the function of the object:

He had been struggling with those empties forever, and the way I see it, without any benefit to humanity or himself. In his shoes, I would have said screw it long ago and gone to work on something else for the same money.<sup>665</sup>

Some scholars consider that the past, or the Bible as an object of the past, may be unknowable and recognise that we say more about the present in the way we attempt to make sense of the past. Thompson, Said,<sup>666</sup> Whitelam,<sup>667</sup> Davies,<sup>668</sup> Greenblatt,<sup>669</sup> Pagden,<sup>670</sup> and Berkhofer<sup>671</sup> are examples of works, which advocate readings of texts from and about the past that take into account the dangers that might come with underestimating the essential unknowability of the past.

If we were to think of the Bible as message or an object from a far-removed time and culture and read it and its place in the contemporary world along the lines of *Contact* and *His Master's Voice* (where in *Contact* a meaning-creating dialogue with the Other is possible and in *His Master's Voice* it is not), we can differentiate between its utopian and dystopian potential in the following way. On the one hand, its message could be generally decipherable and if it were to be successfully deciphered could bring along peace – utopia. On the other hand, it could be an obscure message so alien in today's world that it is not decipherable. All attempts at entering into a meaning-creating dialogue with it

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<sup>664</sup> Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People*, 370.

<sup>665</sup> Strugatsky and Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic*, 7.

<sup>666</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Edward W. Said, “Invention, Memory, and Place,” *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (January 1, 2000): 175–192; Said, “Michael Walzer's ‘Exodus and Revolution’: A Canaanite Reading.”

<sup>667</sup> Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel*.

<sup>668</sup> Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel*.

<sup>669</sup> Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*.

<sup>670</sup> Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man*.

<sup>671</sup> Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*.



are futile and when competing attempts at deciphering it clash, it causes conflict, not between humans and a radically strange deity, but only ever between humans and other humans.

In conclusion: as an “ustopian” story Numbers 13 (or large parts of the Bible in general) are closer to *Star Trek* in how they deal with the Other, and the most convincing reading of “us-them” juxtapositions in the Bible is one that would conclude that these situations are crafted to make statements about the protagonist community of Israelites under YHWH’s rule. In addition to this micro-level reading of a biblical passage, we can read the Bible in terms of SF. We can assume that encountering this text in the contemporary world is a situation similar to the hypothetical situations played through in SF literature, in which a message is received from an alien culture.

Some readers of the Bible will approach it as a text generally decipherable and carrying the potential to bring about a utopian state of peace and reconciliation. They may advocate its decipherability and its applicability, but it is possible that the passion with which this is advocated could have an oppressive undertone. Others will read the Bible as essentially unrecognisable and therefore predominantly a mirror of our home culture. Its essential unrecognisability can bring along conflicts, too, because no party’s hypothesis about its knowability can ever be verified. Marvelling at human inventiveness when faced with this artefact could be an aim and a reward in itself. Suspicion should be exercised, however, if anyone standing in front of the strange object that is the Bible claims to be or to have found the god they are seeking behind the object.

## 8. Conclusions

### 8.1. *Numbers 13 is utopian literature*

A method and outlook shaped by Weber's ideal type, Haraway's cyborgs, and texts such as Borges' "Pierre Menard" enabled a reading of a biblical passage – Numbers 13 – as something it is not commonly thought to be, utopia. Numbers 13 was chosen as a case study because it exhibits a family resemblance to Thomas More's *Utopia*. A group of travellers encounter a land significantly different (better) than their home. They return and report.

Throughout this thesis I have shown that the decision to read in a particular way impacts the text in significant ways. Each and every reading of the Bible or Bible passage is governed by underlying concepts and principles, though they are not always made as explicit as my principle of reading the passage Numbers 13 as a utopia. Just like a utopian reading in 2013 is impacted by Thomas More, the utopian theories of the 1970's, the idea of "utopian" socialism, and horrific failed utopias of the recent and not so recent past, all Bible readings at all times are impacted by an unpredictable and sometimes unknowable assortment of cultural presuppositions. Making explicit the approach to reading by saying, "I am going to read this passage as a utopia", can reveal at least some of the inner workings of a reading, which usually remain implicit.

In constructing the ideal type of utopia for use with the Bible, many levels and potential avenues of inquiry have appeared, some of which were followed up. The question how reality gives rise to the creation of literary utopias and what a utopia's social function is, is one such potential avenue of inquiry. In the field of utopian studies a discussion about how utopias generally respond to reality already took place. Utopias seem to have appeared in large numbers in periods of social changes, sometimes created by groups which were non-dominant at the time. This observation seems to be applicable to the composition

of biblical texts if we presuppose that a small community of elite literati shaped the Hebrew Bible – literati who were members of the elite within their minority community but who were not members of the ruling community at the time. We seemed to have found a way in which we can confirm hypotheses about the social setting of the original creation of the Hebrew Bible by reading it as a utopian response to reality. But can we really?

When one is attempting to survey the typical (ideal typical) features of literary utopias, one comes across the naming pun: *ou/eu-topia* and Louis Marin's observation that this pun is reflected in our inability to draw accurately the maps included in utopias. Roland Boer has applied Marin in biblical studies, so I have furthered his reading of Chronicles with Marin by reading Numbers 13 with Marin. First I found that I could not draw the geographical descriptions of Numbers 13 without consulting some commentary on the map, so I chose to consult Martin Noth.

Consulting the commentary by Noth led to surprising realisations. The first was that the map of Numbers 13 is utopian if we follow Marin, because it is not drawable at all. The second realisation was that Martin Noth, an authoritative, venerable voice in theology and biblical studies, actually makes the map properly utopian, because his authority cannot contribute to arguing convincingly that the places mentioned in Numbers 13 are real, locatable, and empirical. Saying that Numbers 13 is a utopia by only relying on these realisations would have made Numbers 13 an anachronistic utopia in the minds of modern readers.

However, if we compare another utopian map of the Bible, found in Ezekiel, to Numbers 13, we see that the utopian map of Ezekiel has many features in common with the utopian map of Numbers 13. We can conclude then, that the inner-biblical family resemblance between the utopian map of Ezekiel and the geographical descriptions of Numbers 13 may make Numbers 13 a biblical proto-utopia. We can combine the following features: a) the Ezekiel-Numbers relationship makes Numbers 13 a proto-utopia, because it describes a past ideal world not seen in reality by its intended readers. b) The feature of the undrawable map creates an anachronistic utopia in the mind of a modern reader, if she or he is familiar with both the passage and Marin's utopian theory. c) The motif of the journey around the utopian land, including the telescope effect of

landscape description, combined with the motif of return and report exhibit a clear family resemblance to many literary utopias. We can thus conclude: the passage is a proto-utopia, which one may choose not to call utopia because its creation pre-dates the invention of the term, and the passage is an anachronistic utopia.

Literary utopias have been described as heuristic devices, which might inspire critical reflection upon one's home environment. They also carry the potential to become a call to action, which could inspire an audience to take action to attempt to achieve a utopian state of being in reality. The utopia of the Promised Land as found described in Numbers 13 is located within a collection of texts considered to carry authoritative statements on particular communities' religious convictions about attaining divine favour, heaven, or paradise.

The avenue of inquiry which becomes apparent now is: does a utopian image, if it meets a religious belief in its attainability, become an incentive to take action in reality and what are the consequences of this? I have chosen to pursue this avenue by looking at one Bible reader's reading of the case study text. William Bradford has worked on the utopia of Numbers 13 to make it applicable to his reality. His inability to find the utopia in reality obviously confirms a feature of the utopian ideal type – it is impossible to realise, but it can be an incentive to take action in reality. The action taken by Bradford is to find a way to construct his community as even more divinely favoured than the protagonists of the biblical utopia and to make clear that he has learned from the implied lesson of Numbers 13 (those who criticise a Promised Land and refuse to follow YHWH will die). What happens to the utopia of Numbers 13 in this operation is that while it is not mappable in reality, it can be changed to be mapped onto reality, but it has to be re-appropriated.

Yet another feature that is constitutive of an ideal type of utopia comes into view. Utopias are short descriptions of select aspects of a world thought of as particularly important by an author. Reality is more complex than its representation in a utopia. In reality one may encounter issues and people not included in the imagined ideal world of an author. In the example of Bradford, this is the presence of Native Nations in the land thought of as a Promised Land. Residents of the Promised Land are present in the case study text Numbers 13 as

well. A clean-cut utopia may present only a summary of highlights of the issues its authors thought of as particularly important.

Had we used a strict definition of utopia, for example one that would define utopia simply as a “good place”, we may have concluded at this point that Numbers 13 is not a utopia after all, because it features an element that is clearly not thought of as desirable by its authors (we remember Rabkin’s guiding question to define utopia, which is to ask if the narrated world appears to have the author’s approval). But since we are using an ideal type which enables us to see degrees of family resemblances without excluding a phenomenon from the investigation, we can see that Numbers 13 is not a clean utopia. In addition to being a proto-utopia and an anachronistic utopia, it bears distinct family resemblances to conquest and “first contact” scenarios, as well as strong family resemblances to dystopias of coercion and slavery.

Which side of the many readable sides of Numbers 13 appears most clearly depends on who its reader is, and from which cultural, historic, or identity background the reader approaches the text. Depending on who the reader is, a thoroughly dystopian image can form if she or he images the literary utopia of Numbers 13 put into reality. If we read Numbers 13 from the point of view of a Canaanite (or somebody who identifies with Canaanites more than with Israelites), Numbers 13 resembles a dystopia more than it resembles a utopia.

This is not a contradiction but in fact an expected and definitive part of the ideal type of utopia – it contains dystopia, especially if displaced in time or if attempted to be enforced in reality. The ethical *caveat* about utopias put forward by Isaiah Berlin comes back to mind, which I prefixed to these mutations of Numbers 13 from an unsuspecting biblical text into a literary utopia into a literary dystopia. An enforced utopia that does not allow diversity and difference is not one. Here I conclude the argument that Numbers 13 is a utopia, complete with the literary features of a utopia and its potential to turn into a dystopia when encountered by a temporally displaced reader, and would like to encourage readers of the Promised Land, who feel a utopian fervour when confronted with the idea of a Land Flowing With Milk And Honey, to keep a copy of Berlin’s *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* or Mohawk’s *Utopian Legacies* next to their Bible.

## 8.2. *The Bible is science fiction*

We have already seen that a lot of what a text “is” depends on by whom it is read, when it is read, and which books, films, and TV box sets one keeps next to a version of the Bible.

I wanted to read the case study passage as the most contemporary utopia. It deserves to be read in a contemporary way, because it is a contemporary text. I concluded that it contains literary utopias, such as Numbers 13. Contemporary utopian images, as Suvin said, are most often found in SF, so for my own exegetical encounter with some of the more mysterious features of Numbers 13, I chose a science fiction approach.

A reading according to the science fiction hypothesis (which is not any more or less arbitrary than a documentary hypothesis) concluded that the name list featured in Numbers 13 is a Red Shirt trope, highlighting exemplary protagonist behaviour. The Nephilim’s presence is a threat within the story’s ideology because they embody a sustained dualism, which cannot be brought into the utopian ideal of the Promised Land governed by a lone and jealous god. The spies negotiate their social identity and gauge their own insignificance in a universal perspective by comparing themselves to grasshoppers. This humble perspective is not endorsed and they are punished.

One can apply SF theorists’ observations about SF to the Bible if one strains these theories only a little bit (permissibly far, in an approach of family resemblances). Suvin’s novum is present in the Hebrew Bible with proto-scientific rigour, if we decide that the novum of the science fiction Bible is the covenant with YHWH, and the proto-scientific rigour is the way in which laws are introduced and then applied in the stories later on. Differentiations between myth and SF can help us to read the Garden of Eden as myth, but later stories which rely on mythological questions being already answered, as SF in Suvin’s and Atwood’s sense.

If we take into account the cognitive estrangement SF texts are supposed to evoke in their readers by juxtaposing a world in which one or more aspects are thoroughly unfamiliar, one notices that the contemporary Bible reader is in fact reading stories about an unfamiliar far away world. It is possible that the Bible cannot be read as anything but SF in the contemporary world, and as such

negotiates similar questions of self-identification, change, and one's place in a world which one may not be able to dominate.

If we regard the Bible as a message from a far-away time and space, we are still working out how to approach and decipher it in the contemporary world, especially, though not only, in biblical studies. I have looked to SF texts that hypothesise about the reception of similar messages, to say that some readers of the Bible (academic or not) read it as an essentially recognisable message. Some read it as so alien that it is hardly recognisable and only parts of it can be shown to behave consistently in a specific way (example: source P likes to use lists), just like the artefacts found in the novel *Roadside Picnic*. They are consistent in their behaviour but their true purpose in their unknown native environment remains obscure.

I would not want to make a final statement about whether or not the Bible or the past it represents are essentially recognisable or not, because that would mean introducing another strict dichotomy, which I have tried to steer clear of throughout. I would not argue against its recognisability, because there are readers who see it as recognisable. If one were to approach it dogmatically as unrecognisable, one would not be able to understand or enter into a dialogue with those readers. I would want to stress, though, that it is a mirror that reflects a clearer image of human tendencies, struggles, and hermeneutics, than it reflects a past or a god.

My own utopian experiment has been to write a convincing survey of utopian and dystopian potential by using one biblical passage as a case study and putting it into different relationships with texts that surround it. The utopian and dystopian potential is found in structures and family resemblances in the text, in how the disciplines of biblical studies or theology contribute to a construction of the Bible as utopian/dystopian, and in re-appropriations of biblical texts in reality. My utopian ideology is to propose the bending, shaking, and flipping upside down of the text to rattle loose some authoritative readings and supposed final truths attached to it. In a "post-secular" world particularly, individual readings are possible which are independent of institutional authorities. I would not want to claim that a particular reading is "wrong" if it is possible.

However, the action this utopian reading has inspired me to take is to propose to put a warning label on the Bible, which says that today, as in the past,

this collection of texts contains an explosive realistic potential. This potential can be utopian and dystopian, liberating and oppressing. Maybe the cyborg-answer to the question “is there utopian potential in the Bible?” is that it is a sustained oscillation of utopian and dystopian potentials.

### 8.3. *Starting here*

Many themes emerged by applying the unifying idea of utopia to one biblical passage. I never allowed myself to stray as far away from the concept and the case study passage Numbers 13 as one could.

Each chapter could inspire follow-up research. Recently it has often been advocated to use methods derived from sociology, such as the ideal type procedure, as methods in biblical studies. Future methodological research could aim at further mainstreaming and refining such methods.

In biblical studies the concept of utopia has already been applied to particular books or passages. Using an ideal typical approach to defining utopia, one could continue to apply the concept to different biblical passages and include the New Testament. Interesting insights might be derived from looking closely at the Dead Sea Scrolls from a utopian point of view, or expand the view to include early rabbinic literatures, or early Christian literatures.

A large area of future work opens up if one looks specifically at how readers shape the biblical image of a Promised Land or the image of a “chosen” people. I chose to look at specific writings by William Bradford and Cotton Mather in chapter 5 as examples, because they make explicit reference to Numbers 13. One could easily expand from here by looking more widely at passages in the writings of Puritans which reference a Promised Land or describe Native Nations as Canaanites.

With regard to mapping, biblically inspired naming of places, Palestine and Israel, it would be worth looking at Zionism, utopia, and the Promised Land. One could discuss the writings of Theodor Herzl from a utopian point of view, and bring the concept of utopian intentional communities, the Promised Land, and “utopian” socialism into a dialogue with the First Aliyah in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or the later Kibbutz movement. Utopian intentional communities are a subject only touched upon in passing, but their formation, existence, and



dissolution especially with regard to religious worldviews would be a fascinating empirical study.

Another concrete avenue of inquiry, related to utopia and Numbers 13, but not closely enough to be discussed in my thesis, is the way in which sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois uses biblical imagery of the Promised Land in his description of the struggle for civil rights. He refers to the Exodus story repeatedly, but stops making references to the biblical story when the Israelites are on the threshold of conquest. In Du Bois' work we find biblical references combined with an interest in utopia and socialist activism. Du Bois' use of the Bible in his writing would be a fascinating study on its own, but in addition to this, it is possible to read the Bible with Du Bois' concept of Double Consciousness, the feeling of only ever seeing oneself from the point of view of dominant or oppressive society, as if through a veil. For example, one could look at the experience of diaspora and non-dominance and the use of Promised Land imagery in the prophetic books, informed by Du Bois' Double Consciousness.

A closely related but non-biblical trajectory which would be intriguing to investigate further, is the use of utopian and dystopian images in slave narratives – another topic that deserves thorough treatment, upon which I could only touch in footnotes.

That the Bible may be a strange, estranged, and dangerous text has been expressed since the 1990's, at roughly the same time scholars have started referring to a "post-secular" rather than secularised society, in which – they say – religious belief becomes increasingly detached from the authority of institutions such as the church. The work of Ulrich Beck could be brought into a dialogue with biblical studies more.

The life of this estranged text in a "post-secular" society could also be the subject of an empirical study, related to ideas included in my last chapter on the Bible as science fiction. For example, one could study different responses to technological advances by individuals or religious institutions affecting the human body (transhumanism). The utopian dimension comes into play if we consider the future as a Blochian "not-yet", science fiction as giving exemplary expression to this notion of "not-yet", science as an expression of what is currently possible, and the Bible (or religious beliefs – one would have to differentiate carefully here) as a connector between "what was" and "not-yet".

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